

A STUDY ON WOMEN'S ACCESS TO SANITATION SERVICES IN LOW - INCOME COMMUNITIES OF NEW DELHI

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Field Work Dissertation Project (January- April, 2013)

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Abstract: This research was done in the capacity of a trainee researcher as a part of the fieldwork curriculum. In a span of four months (January - April 2013) two low - income communities, situated in North West and North East Delhi, respectively, was selected and a qualitative study was conducted to assess the women's and adolescent girl's access to sanitation-related services in these two communities. The sample size was 34, inclusive of both women and girls. A participatory approach was undertaken for data collection, which included methods like Focus Group Discussions (FGD) and Safety Audit Walk. The data collected from these methods were interpreted by thematic analysis. In both communities the adolescent girls undertook the safety audit walk by identifying spaces in their communities, which made them vulnerable. The FGD was held with both the women and the girls and the information gathered from these discussions ranged from the sanitation services available in the communities, conditions of the community toilet, practice of open defecation, concerns of safety and privacy and action taken by the respondents on the same. The interventions were taken in accordance of the respondents. The study was aimed at consciously evoking participation from the women and the girls and making them major stakeholders in the research process so that the menace of inadequate sanitation services are mitigated, which has the most adverse effects on women and girls.

Keywords: Sanitation, Women, Adolescent Girls, Participatory Methods, Community Toilets, Open Defecation, Privacy and Security.

I. INTRODUCTION

Sanitation as a topic is readily not discussed in public circles especially when one links it with the sensitive issue of women's safety. Sanitation as a concept differs according to its cultural context. Kumar Alok (2010) gives some historical connotations of sanitation – Manu Samhita which is highly revered as important Vedic literature has certain verses that mention certain places where defecation and urination were permitted and also those places where it was restricted. And defecation or urination in the open was strictly prohibited. Further, Alok also mentions the Gandhian concept of sanitation where Gandhi was extremely concerned with the prevailing sanitary conditions existing in the rural areas. During those times nobody perhaps could have picturized that sanitation could be a huge problem in the urban areas as well. With growing rates of urbanization, lack of adequate basic services, including sanitation services has considerably gone worse over the years. With either inadequate budgeting or inefficient spending, the basic services just do not seem to reach the urban poor, which forms a major part of any city's population.

And the most important category among the urban poor which gets affected most vis – a – vis the services related to sanitation are the women residing in the low-income communities of both metropolitan cities and other smaller cities and towns. Sanitation is a highly personalized and sensitive issue which cuts across all classes and caste. But a certain section of women in all these cities has to fight every day to safeguard their dignity and security for undertaking a natural activity

which is essential for human living. For something as natural as defecation millions of women and young girls has to constantly face threats of sexual violence while undergoing this activity.

Following a qualitative methodology, this study entails the use of participatory methods that enable the women and the girls residing in these communities to discuss freely an issue like sanitation. The study is intervention based – with an attempt to utilize the findings efficiently and transparently.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The objectives of the research were 1) To understand women's perception regarding their level of access to sanitation services by employing participatory approaches. 2) To specifically observe the linkage between sanitation and sexual violence. 3) And to formulate appropriate interventions as per the findings.

It is a qualitative based study with a descriptive based research design. The universe considered was all the women and adolescent girls in the communities of Delhi and the ones selected formed the representatives of the universe. Multi stage / cluster sampling and Purposive Non – Probability Sampling were employed.

The sample size was 34 – 20 women and 14 adolescent girls from both the selected communities. Semi – structured interviews, Focus Group Discussions (FGD) and a participatory approach named as Women Safety Audit Walk was used for data collection. The tools employed were a semi – structured interview and FGD guide. A qualitative method of data analysis (thematic analysis) was undertaken.

Some limitations of this study as observed were, due to time constraints a post-assessment could not be carried out to assess the impact of the interventions taken. The second limitation was that this study solely focuses on the services in the sanitation sector. It could also have been linked with the water and the health sectors to make the study more comprehensive as these three sectors are highly interdependent and initiating a change in one of these would have to be made in consonance with the other two sectors. Finally, due to the small sample size, the findings cannot be accurately generalized to the universe.

III. MAJOR FINDINGS AND DATA ANALYSIS

The two selected communities for this research are Zakhira, Shastri Nagar (located in North West Delhi) and Sanjay Camp, Dakshinpuri (located in North East Delhi). In the Zakhira community, the researcher had coordinated with the staff of Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) ; a prominent NGO working in the area and coordinating social programs in the community. The staff also played an instrumental role in mobilizing the respondents for the activities and meetings.

1. Socio - demographic profile of the respondents

Table 1: Number of women and girls in each community

Name of the community	Women	Girls	Total
Zakhira	15 (65.2%)	8 (34.8%)	23 (100%)
Sanjay Camp	5 (45.4%)	6 (54.6%)	11 (100%)

As we see in table 1, in Zakhira community majority of the respondents are women (65.2%). While in Sanjay Camp majority of the respondents are adolescent girls (54.60%).

Table 2: Age group of women

Name of the community	20-30 years	30-40years	Above 40 years	Total
Zakhira	5 (33.3%)	10 (66.7%)	0 (0%)	15 (100%)
Sanjay Camp	0 (0%)	3 (60%)	2 (40%)	5 (100%)

As we see in table 2 , the majority of respondents in Zakhira are in the age group of 30 – 40 years (66.70%). While in Sanjay Camp also majority (60%) are in the same category. In Sanjay Camp (40%) are above 40, and were mainly included as they were prominent members of the Mahila Mandal.

Table 3: Age group of adolescent girls

Name of the community	12-14years	14-20 years	Total
Zakhira	4 (50%)	4 (50%)	8 (100%)
Sanjay Camp	2 (33.3%)	4 (66.7%)	6 (100%)

As we see in Table 3 , in Zakhira 50 % of the girls are in the age group of 12 – 14 years , while the other 50% are in the age group from 14 – 20 years. In Sanjay Camp the majority of the adolescents (66.7%) are in the age group of 14 – 20 years.

Table 4: Educational level of adolescent girls

Name of the community	School going	Dropouts	Total
Zakhira	7 (87.5%)	1 (12.5%)	8 (100%)
Sanjay Camp	3 (50%)	3 (50%)	6 (100%)

As we see in Table 4 , in Zakhira majority of the girls (87.5%) go to school . While in Sanjay Camp there is an equal number of dropouts (50%) as well as school going girls (50%).

In this particular study, two methods of data collection had been used namely Women Safety audit walk undertaken by the adolescent girls and the Focus Group Discussions (FGD) conducted with both women and adolescent girls separately in each of the two communities. Each method will be highlighted separately in this section.

2. Safety Audit Walk

A safety audit consists of a group of women walking in public spaces in their neighbourhood to identify the physical or social characteristics that make space feel safe or unsafe. Women’s safety most importantly uses the concept of “safe spaces”. Space is never neutral, lack of movement and comfort is also a form of social exclusion which in turn promotes insecurity. This participatory tool enables women to analyze the safety of a place from their perspective, focussing mainly on identifying the infrastructural issues and the concept of “gendered use of space”. For this particular study, only the adolescent girls were involved in the participatory walk.

IN ZAKHIRA:

1) The temple in front of the railway line is both a symbol of security and insecurity. When the devotees are present it becomes a secure place, in the absence of devotees, the temple too becomes an insecure place. 2) The public toilet is situated on the other side of the railway line, and the girls have to cross the line every time they go to the toilet, thus having to face some community boys who always assemble in groups near the tracks. 3) There is a milkman ‘s shop in front of the line which according to the girls is a very insecure spot for them, as this is where eve-teasers and harassers mostly gather. 4) The rickshaw pullers under the railway footbridge can be a cause of worry, especially in the evenings when they get drunk. 5) The area just where the temple ends, in front of the tracks, is the place where women mostly practice open defecation. Whereas men have no restrictions in terms of space, they could openly urinate and defecate on any part of the tracks.

OBSERVATIONS: Initially when the activity was started the girls were quite reluctant to go for the safety walk, but when the walk started they realized its importance and carefully noted down each of the findings along with explaining it to the researcher in detail.

IN SANJAY CAMP : 1) Just beside the community toilet, there is a graveyard which is a quite unsafe area because of the presence of boys throughout the day, which makes the girls uncomfortable in using the community toilet freely. 2) In the toilet, there is no proper division between the men and the women’s section of toilets. The existing wall failed to demarcate between the two sections completely, it still had enough gap for the men to enter the women ‘s toilets. There have been cases of molestation inside the toilets and sometimes both young boys and girls have been found coming out of

the same toilet. 3) The girls also spotted an area, which is just opposite to the community toilet where women go for open defecation, especially early in the morning and late in the night. 4) The road towards the mosque is secluded and risky. Nearly all the members of the community used this road as the road ends up saving time but it does pose dangers for both men and women. There have been cases of snatching and even murder when it comes to men and about women cases of molestation and eve-teasing have been reported. 5) Girls also spotted an alcohol shop near the entrance of the community wherein men used to loiter in front of the shop and the surrounding lanes also did not have adequate lighting provisions.

OBSERVATIONS: When the above points, especially point number two was being discussed, some girls thought it facilitates conversation between the opposite sexes in the absence of a suitable recreational public space in the community.

GENDERED SPACE: Another aspect which came out from this activity was in a community the women do not have any “engendered space” as such, most are endangered and hence they do not venture out. The only space which they have is perhaps the open spaces where they go out in groups for defecation. But as we will see in the findings of the FGD, these spaces also pose threats.

3. Focus Group Discussion's (FGD'S)

The FGD were held with both the women and adolescent girls separately in each of the communities. The major findings from these discussions have been explained under various themes as written below.

SANITATION SERVICES AVAILABLE IN THE COMMUNITY

IN ZAKHIRA: Almost all the women and the girls in the discussion said that none of them have an individual toilet in their house and thereby have to use the community toilets. And those who did manage to construct a toilet shared that they had to bribe the police as they stopped them from building it citing it as illegal construction. Once the bribe was paid they were however, allowed to construct their toilets.

IN SANJAY CAMP: Some families in the community have managed to construct their toilets by joining drains to facilitate the building of the sewage system. But the majority in the community still uses the public toilet available as the only form of sanitation-related service in the community.

CONDITION OF THE PUBLIC TOILETS EXISTING IN THE COMMUNITY

IN ZAKHIRA: There are two community toilets, one privately run which is a little closer to the households. And the other has been started by the municipal corporation which is on the other side of the railway track, under the overbridge. Some felt the private toilet remains dirtier while others felt that the public one is dirtier. Women added that the toilet only remains clean during the afternoon when it is freshly cleaned by the sweeper but during morning and evening time it remains so dirty that it is difficult to use it. Both the girls and the women felt that the women have a very big hand in making the toilet dirty. They further said that in the private toilet the women are not required to pay but the men have to pay Rs 2.

IN SANJAY CAMP: There is just one existing community toilet. Previously another toilet existed but now that has been shut down by the authorities, while another toilet has been broken down and made into a marriage hall. According to the women and the girls, although it is a public toilet they have had to privately hire a sweeper and each household has to pay Rs 30 each month for its services. Yet the toilet remains dirty as the majority of times the sweeper does not do her job efficiently and the water supply is inadequate does not facilitate the cleaning of the toilet either. And even here the women and girls blamed each other for keeping the toilet dirty by not using water adequately and disposing of menstrual pads and clothes in the latrine itself in spite of a presence of a dustbin in the toilet itself.

PRACTICE OF OPEN DEFECATION

IN ZAKHIRA: Both the private and the public toilets remain closed after 11 PM. and women are left with no other option but to go for open defecation later in the night on the railway tracks. And sometimes during early morning women prefer going on the tracks rather than using the toilet. The adolescent girls, on the other hand, do not prefer going on the railway tracks and look down upon women who practice the same.

IN SANJAY CAMP: Although here, the community toilet remains open throughout the night, the majority of women and adolescent girls go for open defecation near an open space in front of the community toilet after midnight.

CONCERNS OF “INSECURITY” AND “PRIVACY”

IN ZAKHIRA: Unlike common perceptions women practicing open defecation are not the only victims of sexual violence. Those using the private and the public toilets of the community also face the same consequences. The ones using the private toilet told that the wall guarding the toilet is very low, hence there is a chance that men cross the wall and come inside the toilet from the open space which is just behind the toilet and there have been cases where girls have caught men peeping inside women toilets. Whereas, those using the public toilet shared that there is a lot of risk attached with it, especially after the evenings as the men loiter around the toilet complex, passing sexist comments and there are rickshaw pullers who park their rickshaws under the bridge and when they start consuming alcohol during evening they pose a major threat to the security of the women and the girls. Besides, there is no proper lighting facility under the bridge which leads to more fear among the women and the girls. The situation is so pathetic that women actually eat less at night so that they do not have to use the toilet in the night with the fear of getting sexually assaulted.

IN SANJAY CAMP: Just like in Zakhira even here men were seen roaming around the community toilet during the afternoon and evening which makes the women and the girls uncomfortable using the toilet. There are instances where a certain design in the toilet causes sexual violence – the wall separating the ladies and gents section of the toilets has a gap that facilitates illegal entry of men into the women’s section. While those practicing open defecation are not spared either as the area where they sit for defecation is often inhabited by men and at times men purposefully direct their bike’s headlight on the women who are openly defecating.

ACTION TAKEN BY THE COMMUNITY WOMEN AND GIRLS

IN ZAKHIRA: Some women raised their voices against the practices of gambling and eve-teasing prevalent in the private toilet of the community. But the men have always remained silent spectators and in fact, discouraged women not to interfere in other’s problems. Many women in the course of the discussion shared that they refuse to take action because they know that the perpetrators are from the community itself and raising a voice and handing them over to the police means inviting further problems as they can cause more harm to the woman and her family. The adolescent girls, on the other hand, do not even share that they are getting sexually harassed with the fear of being accused that it is them who provoke men by doing makeup and wearing revealing clothes. The girls also shared that they feared taking action against men who commit sexual crimes in case he reverts and carries on with the incidences of sexual violence.

IN SANJAY CAMP: Some members of the Mahila Mandal have tried mobilizing the community to raise their voices against the sanitation issue in front of the authorities. But they have not been able to gather the other community women for the same.

IV. INTERVENTIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

IN ZAKHIRA

1) *Joint meeting of both the women and the girl respondents:* The findings were discussed along with seeking opinions of the community on the possible solutions. The main intent of the meeting was to link the women and the youth group at one level so that they can collectively address the issue of sanitation and sexual violence. The meeting provided a learning opportunity for the researcher and was suggestive of the fact that both the women and the youth group need to be separately strengthened (by Y.M.C. A.), with a special focus on sanitation and sexual violence issue.

2) *Meeting with the Beat Officer:* After repeated attempts, both the researcher and the community organizer from Y.M.C.A finally managed to meet the beat officer (Officers responsible for providing security to the nearby settlements) to discuss the findings of the study and the possible steps which should be taken to curb the problem of sexual violence in the community.

IN SANJAY CAMP

1) *Meeting with the women and the girls:* The findings were shared with both the women and the girls and a major intervention was chalked out with them, which is mentioned below.

2) *Meeting with the Councillor:* One of the foremost interventions has been facilitating a meeting between the Councillor and the women respondents. The photographs (taken by the researcher during the safety audit walk) depicting the deplorable conditions of the community toilet, areas where open defecation was being practiced and the areas in the settlement where women and girls were prone to harassment were shown to the councillor for visual evidence. Most importantly it was the first time that most of these women had visited any official to keep forth their demands. They gained that level of confidence in the entire meeting that they did not restrict themselves just to the sanitation issue but also discussed certain schemes and the problems which they face in availing them. The councillor laid out the entire plan of building a new mobile toilet and reopening one of the closed community toilets

V. CONCLUSION

In this study, an attempt has been made to focus on services related to sanitation-related services living in low-income communities and how it is inextricably linked with the problem of sexual violence which jeopardizes a women's dignity and security. By employing participatory methods a conscious effort has been made to involve the respondents in the major parts of the research process – especially the data collection and the intervention parts. The two major communities which were selected for the data collection process – Zakhira and Sanjay Camp – between them, the former is a J.J.Slum while the latter is a resettlement colony. This has similarities with the article by Manjistha Banerji (2005) on provisions of basic services in the slums and resettlement colonies of Delhi. She differentiates between slums and resettlement colonies in terms of the location and the basic provisions. When related to this study we see that Zakhira being an illegal slum is located in a very precarious situation – on a railway track of Daya Basti Railway Station while Sanjay Camp as a result of being a planned colony is situated in a proper locality like Dakshinpuri. Banerji, also mentions how the security of tenancy in a resettlement colony encourages the residents to make investments in sectors like health and education. But this study contradicts this particular finding Sanjay Camp has a dropout rate of 50% among adolescents compared to 12.5% in Zakhira.

The major findings in the study have been able to establish a clear linkage between women's access to sanitation services and its implications on their privacy and security. Some of the findings regarding this aspect like women being attacked sexually, men loitering in and around the toilet complex while accessing services and certain infrastructural designs like low height of the wall or the roof of the toilet have also been highlighted in the study on women's right and access to water and sanitation in Asian cities (2009 – 11) in the communities of Bawana and Bhalswa by Jagori and Women in Cities International (WICI). A key component of the study is the introduction of the women participatory safety audit walk which the researcher also tried replicating in this study.

This research was done in 2013, one year before the flagship program on sanitation was announced by the Central Government. The program named Swach Bharat Abhiyan (SBA) has transformed India's sanitation landscape and has set an example for the other developing nations. It will be worth evaluating the program on a larger scale and assess some of the relevancy of the researcher's findings and other similar studies pre SBA in today's context.

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