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INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF
MULTIDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH & REVIEWS

journal homepage: www.ijmrr.online/index.php/home

CHALLENGES IN SUSTAINING OPEN DEFECATION FREE
(ODF) STATUS: A CASE STUDY OF ADHIKARIPATTI VILLAGE
PANCHAYAT, SALEM DISTRICT

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How to Cite the Article: P. Renupriya (2026). Challenges in Sustaining Open Defecation Free (ODF) Status: A Case Study of Adhikaripatti Village Panchayat, Salem District. International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research & Reviews, 5(5),113-124.



<https://doi.org/10.56815/ijmrr.v5i5.2026.113-124>

| Keywords | Abstract |
|---|---|
| Swachh Bharat, Sanitation, Open defecation and Rural Health | This research assesses the effect of Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) on sanitation practices in Adhikaripatti Village Panchayat, Salem District, Tamil Nadu. Through a mixed-methods study (n=138 households), the study reveals a substantial "Knowledge-Action Gap": 81% are aware of SBM, but 34% continue to openly defecate, especially the elderly and males. The qualitative results from Focus Group Discussions show that the infrastructural achievements are constrained by the lack of regular maintenance and reuse of toilets for storage. This paper argues that to promote health in the long term, SBM needs to move from "toilet construction" to "behavioural sustainability". |

INTRODUCTION

India's one of the most important Sustainable Development Goals is having access to clean water and sufficient sanitation. Sanitation has historically been a key problem for the nation, since independence government has implemented Nemours programs to achieve the goal. The natural relationship between personal hygiene, access to adequate sanitation, and health is highlighted by the



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Ministry of Rural Development (2007). Although the disposal of human excreta was the key focus of previous concepts of sanitation, modern concepts cover a wider range which includes personal and household hygiene, food waste management, disposal of solid and liquid waste, and environmental cleanliness (GOI, 2007). Good sanitation has a positive effect on individuals as well as the public health of society as a whole.

Subsequently, customs and traditions play a major and strong role in the daily lives of Indians, the challenge is tolerated despite the many schemes and initiatives that have been implemented over the years. These strongly ingrained behaviours have proven difficult to overcome, as dismal performance in previous attempts to reach greater than 50% reach attests to. In response to this problem, the Prime Minister of India has introduced the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM), also known as the Clean India Mission, which was launched on October 2, 2014, as a national effort to enhancement of hygienic practices and habits. The Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation (MDWS) has taken part as in charge of the mission. It is divided into two smaller missions such as SBM (Gramin) and SBM (Urban). The Union Government (2015) says that SBM Gramin, which is an improved version of the Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan that started in 1999, wants to put in place full sanitation programs. In 2015, sanitation coverage stood at 40%, with 63% in urban areas and 29% in rural regions (Chittaranjan Subudhi and Srinivasan Padmanaban, 2019). The 1993 73rd constitutional amendment gave village panchayats special attention by including sanitation in the 11th Schedule. As a result, the village panchayats are in charge of the main activities of the Swachh Bharat Mission-Gramin. They are responsible for getting people involved in the community, keeping the environment clean, and building clean toilets, which means safely getting rid of solid and liquid waste in village communities.

NEED AND IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

Every culture and religion on the planet concurs that maintaining good hygiene and sanitation is essential. Many nations struggle with unhygienic circumstances, which over time can obstruct their economic development—the COVID-19 pandemic's effects serve as a vivid reminder of this fact (GOI, Economic Survey 2018-19). Even after 75 years of freedom, India still faces many challenges related to poor sanitation. In 2014, over 55 crore individuals continued to practice open defecation, accounting for 60% of all cases worldwide. Approximately 1 crore urban and 10 crore rural homes in India lacked sanitary toilets (LIXIL, Water Aid, and Oxford Economics, 2016).

Additionally, degradable and non-degradable garbage is a key issue and hazard to public health and sanitation, particularly in rural areas. In rural India, a shocking 15,000 to 18,000 million litres of liquid garbage and 0.3 to 0.4 million metric tons of solid waste are produced daily. The waste is mostly organic and biodegradable. Water-borne illnesses including malaria, dengue, cholera, typhoid, diarrhoea, and schistosomiasis flourish when such trash is improperly disposed of, (UNICEF 2012). Around 88% of the overall disease burden was caused by poor sanitation and



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unclean water is responsible. Which causes diarrheal illnesses that kill rural children under five (NFHS-3, 2005-06).

To address these intricate health and environmental issues, the Swachh Bharat Mission was launched with the goal of preventing and minimizing such occurrences. As stated in the Indian constitution, the state government has been instrumental in the fight against open defecation by highlighting the significance of village Panchayats in sanitation.

The Swachh Bharat Mission aims to enhance the standard of living in rural areas by advocating for cleanliness and hygiene, doing away with open defecation, attaining rapid sanitation coverage by October 2, 2019, promoting appropriate and cost-effective technologies, encouraging sustainable sanitation practices through awareness-raising, and developing community-managed sanitation systems that prioritize scientific solid and liquid waste management for overall cleanliness in rural areas (TN Govt, 2015).

As seen by Mizoram's success, where the people, non-governmental organizations, and the government collaborated effectively, community mobilization has been crucial to maintaining the area clean. Administrative machinery in a number of states has implemented methods to encourage good hygiene and health, including educating students and involving women, the public, and religious leaders. The construction and usage of toilets can either directly or indirectly improve physical health, the environment, life expectancy, and emotional well-being by offering comfort, privacy, and mental health (Manasi Gore and Meenal Annachhatre, 2018). The government frequently emphasizes that the importance of building and using toilet is having personal connection with each individual health and well-being and their environments.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The researcher has reviewed several pertinent literatures, with a few significant reviews highlighted below. In 1990, 13% of people across the country succumbed to illnesses related to poor water and sanitation, a figure that had significantly decreased to 5% by 2016. According to registered data from the Global Health Observatory, child diarrhoea deaths in India declined from 121,889 in 2014 to 117,285 in 2015 and further to 102,813 in 2016. The Swachh Bharat mission played a pivotal role during 2014-2015, contributing to a substantial reduction in the child mortality rate from 13% to 9% (Ministry of Environment Forest Climate Change, GoI, 2016). According to a survey, the implementation of Open Defecation Free (ODF) practices and increased knowledge of them have reduced the death rate of children under five years old and decreased the occurrence of waterborne infections. The Swachh Bharat Mission has to address environmental challenges and water management for long-term benefits (Economic Survey, 2018–19).

The main goal of the Swachh Bharat Mission is to establish a politically impartial program for the nation's welfare. The broad success and popularity of the Swachh Bharat Mission have attracted



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attention from businesses actively engaging, including students, teachers, health professionals, and private organizations. This mission acts as a catalyst to urge people to preserve cleanliness. Visitors from around the world as well as those in India (Sneh Lata Singh, Neelma Kunwar, and Anchal Sharma, 2018). A poll that was submitted to the parliament emphasized the Swachh Bharat Mission's noteworthy accomplishments. Up till 2014, 56.4% of the country's population, or 10 crore dwellings in rural areas and 1 crore houses in urban areas, did not have sanitary toilets. This was highlighted by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman. From 2015 to 2019, the mission's goals of ending open defecation led to a significant drop in infant mortality rates, as well as fewer incidents of diarrhea, malaria, stillbirths, and low birth weight (Nirmala Sitharaman, Finance Minister, 2019).

Research gap

The Swachh Bharat Mission, though a national agenda, is ultimately the outcome of the sociocultural and geographical particularity of individual villages. The Adhikaripatti Village Panchayat in the Ayothiyapattinam block of Salem District is a key case study for rural Tamil Nadu, representing a cross-section of the population across the six villages of Ambedkar Colony, Arunthathiyar Vattam, Sengadu, Govinda Gowndar Kadu, Arujuna Udayar Kadu and Krishna Nagar. While the district has made substantial development progress, there remains a critical gap in literature on the interaction between community mobilisation and top-down sanitation strategies in this particular cluster of 1,386 households. Through a systematic random sample of 138 households and integrated Focus Group Discussions, this analysis goes beyond state-level data to examine the localised "Knowledge-Action Gap". Adhikaripatti presents a unique testing ground to explore why infrastructure doesn't necessarily translate into practice, and provides insights into the particular environmental and social challenges - such as maintenance problems and re-purposed facilities - that continue to plague high population density rural blocks.

TOOLS AND METHODS

This study was carried out in six villages in the Salem District of Tamil Nadu: Ambedkar Colony, Arunthathiyar Vattam, Sengadu, Govinda Gowndar Kadu, Arujuna Udayar Kadu, and Krishna Nagar. It was performed in the Adhikaripatti village Panchayat, Ayothiyapattinam block. 1386 households make up the whole Panchayat according to the 2011 census. The aim of the study is to increase the respondents' knowledge of the Swachh Bharat Mission and to assess the impact of the mission in the study villages. In this study, the researcher adopted systematic random sampling, with a sample from every tenth household. Twenty homes were chosen from the six villages, with 18 homes from Arujuna Udayar Kadu as it had more homes than the other villages. Thus, there were 138 samples. We used an interview schedule for data collection and made observations. And as part of the data collection, the general public of Adhikaripatti village Panchayat also participated in a Focus Group Discussion (FGD), where nine people - Four men and Five women - took part in the discussion about open defecation and the disposal of solid and liquid waste in their area. For interpretation of the data



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collected, a mixed method approach was combined using the interview schedule and the FGD to get the necessary information and data from the field. A descriptive study design was chosen.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Chart No -1

Awareness by Respondents about the Swachh Bharat Mission



The discrepancy between the high awareness (81.15%) and the high incidence of open defecation (46.15% in general, and 57.89% among the elderly) highlights a significant "knowledge-action gap" in the study area. This is because while "cognitive penetration" (the process through which the idea of swachh bharat mission reaches a majority of the population) has been achieved, this has not resulted in a uniform change in behaviour. This imbalance implies that the key factor preventing adhikaripatti from achieving open defecation free (ODF) status is no longer the absence of knowledge, but rather the persistence of habitual behaviour, problems with infrastructure maintenance, and cultural resistance to change. To ensure success of SBM Phase II, policy measures must move away from merely creating awareness to "behavioural economics" strategies that target the reasons for the continued preference of the open environment by those with awareness. Overcoming this gap is the key challenge in ensuring that the sanitation infrastructure, in addition to being a visible asset, is also a sustainable practice for all age and gender groups.



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Table No-1
Age and Gender Using Toilet

| Age category | Household Toilet | Community Toilet | Open Defecation | % |
|---------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------|---------------|
| 18-38 | 08 (28.57) | 10 (35.71) | 10 (35.71) | 28 (20.28) |
| 39-58 | 09 (26.47) | 13 (38.23) | 12 (35.29) | 34 (24.36) |
| 59 and above | 21 (27.63) | 11 (14.47) | 44 (57.89) | 76 (55.07) |
| Total | 34 (26.15) | 36 (27.69) | 60 (46.15) | 138 (100) |
| Gender | | | | |
| Male | 18 (29.02) | 07 (11.29) | 37 (59.67) | 62 (44.92) |
| Female | 36 (47.36) | 30 (39.47) | 10 (13.15) | 76 (55.07) |
| Total | 54 (39.13) | 37 (26.81) | 47 (34.05) | 138 (100) |

A thorough examination of the assessed population's toilet usage across age and gender categories is shown in table No. 1. When looking at age groups, it's clear that open defecation is still a big problem because 35.71% of people in the 18–38 age range engage in this behavior. Results from the installation of private and public restrooms have been encouraging, especially in the 39–58 age range, where 73.53% of people have access to sanitary facilities. Notably, there is a significant difference in the senior population (59 years of age and above), with 57.89% of them still defecating in the open. The gender-based analysis showed that women are more likely to use household toilets (29.02%) than men who have a higher inclination to defecate in the open (59.67%). Overall, the results underline the need for targeted programs to solve gender- and age-related sanitation problems. To achieve an inclusive and gender balanced sanitation coverage, the findings also underline the importance of active measures for encouraging the use of household toilets, especially among the elderly and men.

Table no -2
Respondents' Opinions on the Impacts of the Swachh Bharat Mission

| Category | Yes | No | % |
|------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Clean drinking water | 45 (50.56) | 07 (14.48) | 52 (37.68) |
| Cleans Sewage/Drainage | 21 (23.59) | 14 (28.57) | 35 (25.36) |
| Disposal of garbage | 08 (8.98) | 20 (40.81) | 28 (20.28) |
| Adequate health care | 15 (16.85) | 08 (16.32) | 23 (16.16) |
| Total | 89 (64.49) | 49 (35.50) | 138 (100) |



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Table 2 provides valuable insights into respondents' opinions on various issues, based on their views about the effects of the Swachh Bharat Mission. Most people (50.56%) believe the mission has positively influenced access to safe drinking water, showing that the mission's impacts on water quality are recognised. Likewise, 23.59% and 8.98% of respondents credit the mission for maintaining sewage and drainage infrastructure, and ensuring the proper disposal of waste, respectively. This suggests that the Swachh Bharat Mission and improvements in sanitation infrastructure are positively associated with each other. Notably, 64.49% of respondents overall have a positive view of the mission's impact, confirming its effectiveness in improving aspects such as waste disposal, sewage systems and water supply. But 35.50% of respondents have a more negative view, which implies that more work is needed in terms of highlighting the mission's specific impacts or improving areas where the impact may be weaker. Further qualitative research or specific surveys could delve deeper into the specific factors affecting respondents' perceptions and provide a more nuanced understanding of the perceived success of the Swachh Bharat Mission in the community.

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

The nine participants in the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) at Adhikaripatti Village Panchayat, Salem District, Tamil Nadu, were a diverse group consisting of three men and four women. The management of solid and liquid waste in their community as well as open defecation were topics of lively discussion among the attendees. The participants stated that although each hamlet within the Panchayat had separate facilities for men and women, only the women's restroom was operational at the Panchayat level. In addition, the male players had to resort to open defecation because there weren't enough working male restrooms. Under the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) project, 370 individual toilets were built; however, it was stated that the majority of these facilities were being used as storage rooms. One worry that came up time and time again among the participants was the issue of inconsistent toilet upkeep and cleaning.

The Panchayat was said to handle solid waste once a week or once every two weeks, with solar trucks coming by occasionally to pick up trash. Participants discussed difficulties they had during the rainy season, bringing up incidents in which street drainage overflowed and caused illnesses like dengue and other watery infections. Every roadway was said to have trash cans, however irregular cleaning procedures were mentioned. Even though most homes had water pipes on alternate days, participants noted that rubbish was frequently burned or kept in the graveyard since there were no recycling facilities and that it was not possible to separate compostable and non-compostable material.

There was also a discussion on the gap between the expectations of the authorities for daily cleaning activities and the absence of sanitary personnel willing to take on some of the cleaning activities. Despite these challenges, the members agreed to continue with the cleaning. These findings underline the need for widespread awareness-raising, waste management and sanitation



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infrastructure upgrades, to meet the Swachh Bharat Mission goals and improve the overall sanitation and hygiene practices in Adhikaripatti Village Panchayat.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The research provided some key findings that shed light on the level of awareness and sanitation in the study area. Although there has been great improvement in the building of household toilets, the Table 1 research revealed that open defecation still takes place among different age groups, particularly among those aged above fifty-nine. Gender variations were also observed, with men being more likely to openly defecate. This suggests the importance of targeted interventions to combat some of the gender- and age-specific challenges in order to promote universal sanitation.

Table 1 revealed that 81.15% of the participants had heard about the Swachh Bharat Mission, indicating widespread awareness of the mission. This positive development is an indicator of the success of awareness-raising programs, but further studies on the details and complexities of this awareness will provide valuable insights that will help in refining the communication strategies and ensure continued engagement from the community.

As per Table 2, your respondents' views of the Swachh Bharat Mission's impact are largely positive, with a significant majority of respondents crediting the mission for improved clean water, cleanliness of sewerage/drainage and solid waste management. However, a considerable proportion of respondents retain their cynicism, pointing to the need for a deeper understanding of the community perspective and targeted measures to address specific concerns.

The Focus Group Discussion (FGD) highlighted challenges and implementation gaps in sanitation projects. The practice of open defecation (particularly among men), and the lack of difference between the construction of toilets and their effective use, and the intermittent maintenance, underline the importance of infrastructure improvement and ongoing behaviour change strategies. The challenges relating to solid waste disposal, drainage during the monsoon and the burning of waste underline the need for holistic approaches that consider the impacts on the environment and health.

The findings of the study underline the multifaceted nature of sanitation challenges and the need for holistic and localised solutions. Despite the Swachh Bharat Mission's success, to ensure that the benefits of improved sanitation and hygiene practices are equitable and sustained in the evaluated area, gaps need to be addressed and strategies need to be tailored to local demographic and environmental circumstances.

CONCLUSION

Consequently, the study's findings provide a clear understanding of the sanitation scenario in the studied community, with both positive and negative impacts of the Swachh Bharat Mission's (SBM)



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implementation. The construction of private home latrines is good, but therapies are needed to address persistent open defecation of certain age groups (e.g., the elderly) and gender inequalities. High awareness of the SBM suggests that communication strategies have been effective, but for better community participation, the study suggests a need to explore the nuances and intricacies of this awareness.

Perceptions of the impact of the SBM are positive with positive or neutral views on waste disposal, cleanliness of sewage/drainage and access to safe drinking water. However, a considerable portion of respondents' distrust shows that to tackle specific community issues and improve the legitimacy of sanitation programs, more nuanced measures are needed.

The Focus Group Discussion (FGD) identified areas like a mismatch between toilet design and use, intermittent maintenance, and continued open defecation (particularly among men). Issues with solid waste disposal, drainage during the rainy season, and waste burning point to the complexities of environmental and health issues related to sanitation.

These findings demonstrate the need for an integrated approach to ensure sanitation programs are effective. Along with the development of infrastructure, the need to use community-specific treatments, targeted outreach, and continuous behavior change campaigns is necessary. The need for concerted effort is emphasized in this study to close the gaps for all to benefit from the SBM. The study's outcomes can provide direction for policymakers as India approaches the establishment of equitable and sustainable sanitation practices.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The following remarks and suggestions made from this study's findings are intended to improve the effectiveness of sanitation efforts regarding the swachh bharat mission (sbm):

1. The development and implementation of tailored behavior change campaigns that identify and address open defecation issues based on gender and age. Awareness campaigns can be more successful by adapting communication strategies to be more suitable for the intended audience.
2. Strengthen monitoring systems so that restrooms developed will receive adequate and consistent maintenance so they will be functional as intended. Establish local committees or use local governmental authorities to regularly monitor and promptly assist with maintenance issues.
3. Community Engagement Initiatives: Create community engagement initiatives that encourage individuals to play an active role in their own hygiene. Community-organized initiatives will foster a sense of responsibility and ownership, which will support the sustainability of sanitation initiatives.
4. More Sanitary Workforce: Recruit and train more sanitary employees to rectify the current lack of sanitary employees. An appropriate number of employees is critical due to the increasing demand for ongoing maintenance of the sanitary infrastructure and daily housekeeping tasks.



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5. Community-Specific Solutions: Customize sanitation solutions to address the individual needs and challenges of the Panchayat's communities. Conduct on-site assessments to gather an understanding of the location-specific, cultural, and demographic variables that will have an impact on sanitation practices.

6. Monitoring and Evaluation Framework: Establish an adequate monitoring and evaluation framework to provide consistent measures of sanitation program performance. Continuous feedback loops will inform adaptive processes and improvements.

7. Education on separating garbage: Programs should be conducted stressing the benefits of separating garbage that is compostable from non-compostable garbage. Politically authorized persons can create an environmentally friendly culture by disposing of trash in a proper manner. Policymakers and local authorities can continue to ensure improved hygiene/sanitation practices in the study areas through implementing these recommendations as part of the overall goal of the Swachh Bharat Mission (Clean India Mission). In addition, continuing to support the long-range success of all initiatives for sanitation will also assist with improving conditions in the study area.

AUTHOR(S) CONTRIBUTION

The writers affirm that they have no connections to, or engagement with, any group or body that provides financial or non-financial assistance for the topics or resources covered in this manuscript.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

PLAGIARISM POLICY

All authors declare that any kind of violation of plagiarism, copyright and ethical matters will take care by all authors. Journal and editors are not liable for aforesaid matters.

SOURCES OF FUNDING

The authors received no financial aid to support for the research.

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