

WORLD TOILET DAY

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*Equality, dignity and the link between
gender-based violence and sanitation*





EQUALITY, DIGNITY...AND TOILETS?

One billion people around the world do not have access to a toilet, and are forced to go out in the open.

Having to defecate openly infringes on human safety and dignity. This holds particularly true for women and girls, who lose privacy and face shame having to defecate in public, or – after painfully holding their bladder and bowels all day – risk attack by waiting until night falls.

Since 2000, the world has been working towards ending open defecation by improving access to toilets through the United Nations Millennium Development Goals. However, significant progress, particularly to ensure equitable access, is still needed.

As highlighted in most recent progress reports, numerous inequalities in access to toilets exist. Urban areas gain, and have significantly more access to services than rural. Nine out of 10 people defecating openly live in rural areas. Within urban and rural areas, the wealthy have disproportionately greater access to toilets than impoverished populations. Disparities in access also exist between religious, ethnic, and other identifiable groups, with disenfranchised groups having less access to services.

Where toilets do exist, not everyone is able to use them. Toilets generally remain inadequate for populations with special needs, such as the disabled and elderly, and women and girls requiring facilities to manage menstrual hygiene. Without accessible toilets for these populations, they remain excluded from opportunities to attend school and gain employment.

In striving to achieve access to toilets under the Millennium Development Goals, inequalities have become apparent. A shift towards universal approaches is vital to achieving goals and protecting dignity.

Sources:

The Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council, WaterAid, Unilever Domestos. (2013). *We Can't Wait: A report of sanitation and hygiene for women and girls*. Retrieved from: <http://www.wateraid.org/what-we-do/our-approach/research-and-publications/view-publication?id=a5ab0a96-1574-4225-a16a-75d5e5ec4232>

WHO / UNICEF. (2014). *Joint Monitoring Programme: Progress on drinking water and sanitation: 2014 update*. Retrieved from: http://www.wssinfo.org/fileadmin/user_upload/resources/JMP_report_2014_webEng.pdf



TOILETS AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

One in three women around the world are victims of violence at least once in their lifetime.

The connections between toilets and violence against women may not initially be obvious. But consider a woman without access to a toilet in her home. When travelling to and from public toilets, using the toilet, or venturing from her home to defecate openly, she is vulnerable to violence. This vulnerability is becoming increasingly recognized and described.

Women experiencing regular discrimination from men express fear of assault or rape when having to leave the house to use the toilet. Reports of attacks or harassment near or in toilet facilities, as well as near or in areas where women defecate openly, are not uncommon. The consequences of such violence against women are both physical and psychological for the victim, and extend to families and communities that continue to live with gender based inequalities and lost economic potential of victims.

You might remember the two young girls from Uttar Pradesh, India, raped and murdered this year while looking for a toilet. While it is important to recognize that lack of access to toilets was not the cause of this violence, not having a safe place to go to the toilet facilitated the violent act.

It is our duty to protect vulnerable women from experiences of gender-based violence. Universal access to safe toilets has a clear role to play in defending women's safety and dignity.

Sources:

House, Sarah, Suzanne Ferron, Marni Sommer and Sue Cavill. (2014). *Violence, Gender & WASH: A Practitioner's Toolkit – Making water, sanitation and hygiene safer through improved programming and services*. London, UK: WaterAid/SHARE. Retrieved from: <http://violence-wash.lboro.ac.uk/toolkit/>

Barbara Frost. (June, 2014). *Two girls died looking for a toilet. This should make us angry, not embarrassed*. Retrieved from: <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2014/jun/01/girls-toilet-rape-murder-anger-embarrassment>

Shirley Lennon & Sanitation and Hygiene Applied Research for Equity. (2012). *Fear and Anger: Perceptions of risks related to sexual violence against women linked to water and sanitation in Delhi, India*. Retrieved from: http://www.sharesearch.org/LocalResources/VAW_India.pdf

World Health Organization. (2013). *Global and regional estimates of violence against women: Prevalence and health effects of intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence*. Retrieved from: <http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications/violence/9789241564625/en/>



CAN TOILETS REDUCE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN?

Toilets can play a role in protecting women. The most obvious way is through access.

With access to a toilet, women no longer have to defecate in the open where they feel ashamed, and vulnerable to predators when having to expose themselves publicly. In addition to access, there are numerous considerations for limiting the risk of violence associated with toilets.

For example, it is important to consider the distance in which women have to travel to access toilets. The closer a toilet is to the home, the less amount of time a woman is vulnerable during travel, commonly by dark, to reach a toilet. Also, being within proximity to the home and established social networks, a woman feels less vulnerable when relieving herself, and able to call for help if needed.

The conditions in which women need to travel to access toilets, as well as conditions of toilet facilities, also play a role. A footpath that is well covered for example puts a woman in a more vulnerable situation than a path that is exposed and well travelled. While a toilet that is light, is with a lock on the door, and has separate facilities for men, women, and children, does more to protect against violence than facilities lacking such conditions.

Access to safe toilets and violence against women is a complex issue. On top of the examples provided on how toilets can play role in protecting women against violence, it is important to consider culture, gender roles, policy, community participation, and collaboration across sectors in efforts to limit experiences of gender based violence.

While poor access to toilets is not the cause of violence against women, it can increase a woman's vulnerability to violence. As advocates of safe toilets for all, it is our obligation to consider protection against violence in all aspects of policy and programming. Otherwise, our work can exacerbate vulnerabilities to violence.

Sources

House Sarah, Suzanne Ferron, Marni Sommer and Sue Cavill. (2014). Violence, Gender & WASH: A Practitioner's Toolkit – Making water, sanitation and hygiene safer through improved programming and services. London, UK: WaterAid/SHARE. Retrieved from: <http://violence-wash.lboro.ac.uk/toolkit/>
The Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council, WaterAid, Unilever Domestos. (2013). We Can't Wait: A report of sanitation and hygiene for women and girls. Retrieved from: <http://www.wateraid.org/what-we-do/our-approach/research-and-publications/view-publication?id=a5ab0a96-1574-4225-a16a-75d5e5ec4232>



FACTS

Facts

- 1 in 3 women are victims of violence at least once in their lifetime.¹
- 1 in 3 women do not have access to safe toilets²
- 2.5 billion people – that's 1/3 of the globally population – do not have access to safe toilets³
- 1 billion people do not have access to a toilet, and are forced to go out in the open³
- 9/10 people who defecate openly live in rural settings³

¹ 1. World Health Organization. (2013). *Global and regional estimates of violence against women: Prevalence and health effects of intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence*. Retrieved from: <http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications/violence/9789241564625/en/>

² <http://www.wateraid.org/uk/news/news/water-and-sanitation-key-to-tackling-violence-against-women-and-girls>

³ WHO / UNICEF. (2014). *Joint Monitoring Programme: Progress on drinking water and sanitation: 2014 update*. Retrieved from: http://www.wssinfo.org/fileadmin/user_upload/resources/JMP_report_2014_webEng.pdf



QUOTES

“A woman does not feel safe walking to the toilet. Men rape women there at night.”⁴

“The toilets are far from our houses...A man can just go anywhere to pass urine, but a woman has to walk all the way to the toilets.”⁴

“There are two main difficulties for women when it comes to toilets in our communities. The first one is money, and the second is that at night men can easily rape and murder us.”⁴

“It is secret and shameful for others to know that you are having your period.”⁴

“Women, more than men, suffer the indignity of being forced to defecate in the open, at risk of assault and rape.”⁵

“Women, generally being responsible for children and other dependents, are more affected by a lack of sanitation and by the indignity of living without sanitation...”⁵

⁴ Keren Massey and SHARE Research Consortium. (2012). *Briefing Note: ‘Insecurity and Shame: Exploration of the impact of the lack of sanitation on women in slums of Kampala, Uganda.* Retrieved from: http://www.sharesearch.org/LocalResources/VAW_Uganda.pdf

⁵ Amnesty International. (2010). *Risking Rape to Reach a Toilet: Women’s experiences in the slums of Nairobi, Kenya.* Retrieved from: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/AFR32/006/2010/en/6eab2ee6-6d6c-4abd-b77c-38cfc7621635/afr320062010en.pdf>