

Understanding the Issue of Open Defecation in Bokaro, Jharkhand, India
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Open defecation remains common in much of the developing world, including India. The practice is associated with health, safety, and environmental risks. In India, following *Swachh Bharat* (“Clean India”), a nationwide, four-year campaign that claimed to distribute 110 million free latrines to 600 million people, the Chief Minister of Jharkhand declared the state open defecation free (ODF) on October 2, 2018¹. However, reports from local doctors of concerning diarrhea levels lend doubt to claims of *Swachh Bharat*’s success. Thus, to better understand the practice of open defecation and its possible effects on diarrhea in the area, members of our team traveled to Bokaro, Jharkhand to gather qualitative and quantitative data. Our fieldwork consisted of eight focus groups, plus interviews with 22 community members, 11 healthcare professionals, and an NGO founder. Data was stratified by community type – urban commercial, urban slum, and rural. We found that open defecation is still widely practiced throughout Bokaro, particularly in urban slums and rural villages. However, no open defecation was reported in the urban commercial communities sampled. Moreover, many households did not receive free latrines as claimed; for those that did, no provisions were made to maintain them or ensure their use. These findings suggest that current surveillance mechanisms for tracking open defecation are insufficient and simply providing free latrines was not enough to end the practice. Future research efforts should focus on expanding upon these findings with larger samples and exploring what is needed for the continued reduction of open defecation in India.

References

1. Bhatia, Anisha. “CM Raghubar Das Declares Jharkhand ODF, One Year Before State's Swachh Target. Here's The Success Story: News.” NDTV, November 20, 2018. <https://swachhindia.ndtv.com/cm-raghubar-das-declares-jharkhand-odf-one-year-states-swachh-target-heres-success-story-28095/>.