



# Understanding the Issue of Open Defecation in Bokaro, Jharkhand, India

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## BACKGROUND

Open defecation remains common in much of the developing world posing health, safety, and environmental concerns.

- Increases susceptibility to developing life-threatening illnesses, such as diarrhea, India's third leading cause of child mortality.<sup>1</sup>
- Puts women at a higher risk of being attacked or raped due to public exposure.<sup>2</sup>

In 2014, India's Prime Minister launched *Swachh Bharat* ("Clean India"), a four-year campaign aimed at eliminating open defecation in the country by 2019.<sup>3</sup>

- Primarily focused on constructing latrines.
- More than 110 million latrines were built.

On October 2, 2018, the Chief Minister of the state of Jharkhand announced the state Open Defecation Free (ODF).<sup>3</sup>

- In September of 2019, all of India was declared ODF.<sup>3</sup>

## PARTICIPANTS

We conducted 8 focus groups in total: 1 with shop owners in an urban commercial area of Chas, 1 with residents of an urban slum of Chas, and 6 with residents of rural villages in both Chas and Chandankiyari. We also conducted 22 interviews with community members, 11 interviews with healthcare professionals, and 1 interview with an NGO founder.

Community Type	Men	Women	Total
Rural village	15	42	57
Urban Commercial	7	0	7
Urban slum	3	4	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>71</b>

**Table 1.** The 71 focus group participants stratified by community type.

## DISCUSSION

Despite state and federal government efforts to eliminate open defecation, the practice remains fairly common in the urban slums and rural villages of the Chas and Chandankiyari blocks of Bokaro, refuting claims that Jharkhand is ODF.

- Many rural households still lack latrines as the government failed to subsidize their construction.
- Even when access to a latrine is available, open defecation still occurs due to maintenance issues, cleanliness concerns, convenience, and cultural norms.

The government says that *Swachh Bharat* "... helped change the way of thinking about open defecation and the importance of using toilets."<sup>4</sup>

- While awareness has increased, behavior has not changed accordingly.

## ISSUE

Local doctors in Bokaro, a district in Jharkhand, reported to our team concerns regarding diarrhea levels in the area, calling into question the claims that open defecation has been eradicated.

## METHODS

In December of 2019, 4 members of our team traveled to the blocks of Chas and Chandankiyari in Bokaro for 3 weeks.

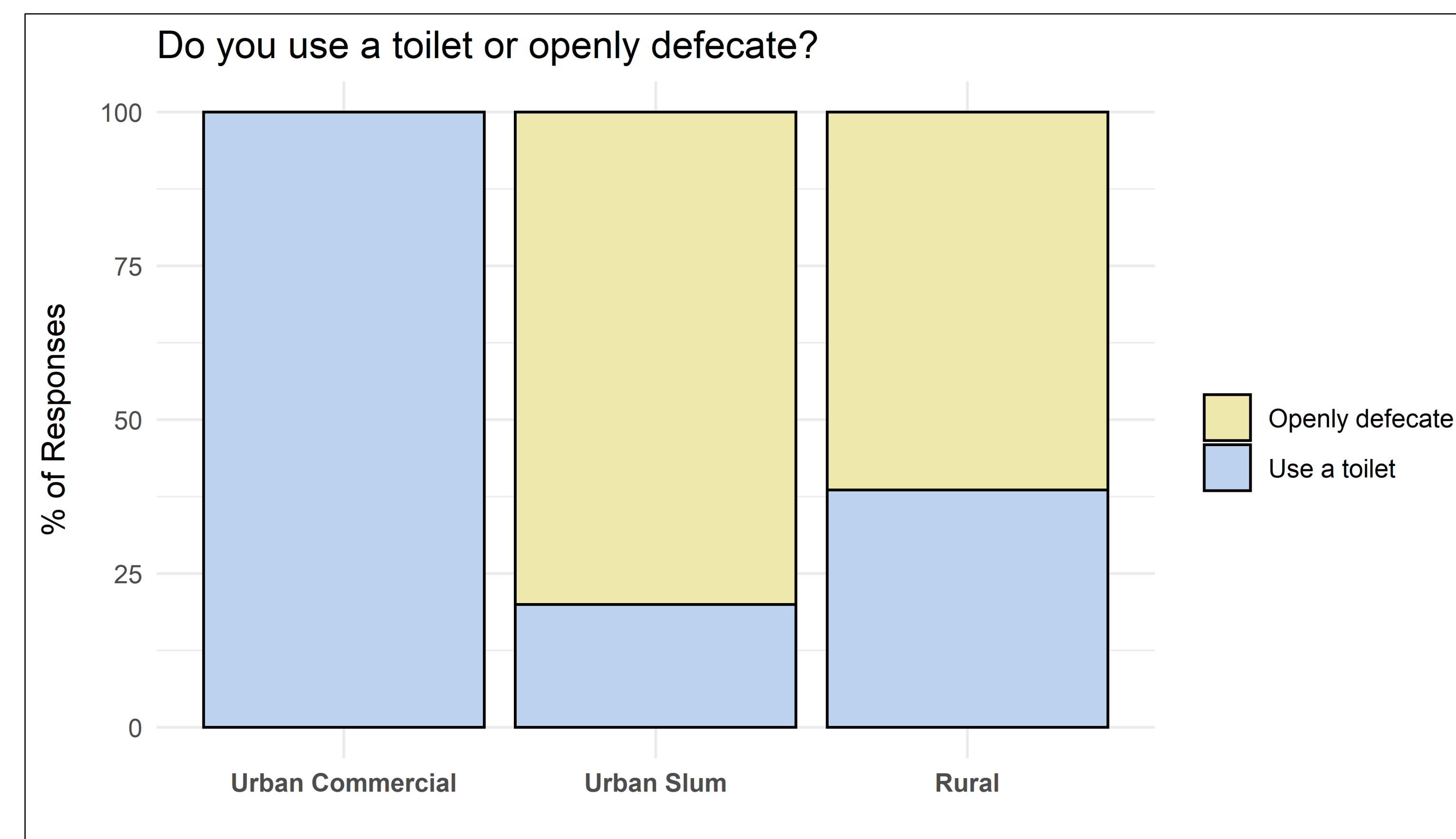
Quantitative and qualitative data was collected from 8 communities.

- Data was collected from community members with focus group questionnaires, focus group discussions, and personal interviews.
- Healthcare providers were also interviewed.

Data was stratified for analysis by community type – urban commercial, urban slum, and rural – then analyzed to understand the state of open defecation in the area.



## RESULTS



**Figure 1.** 61.4% of rural participants and 80.0% of urban slum participant responded that they practice open defecation.

Subsequent interviews revealed some potential reasons for the continuing practice of open defecation, including:

- Lack of latrines
- Insufficient sewage infrastructure
- Poor maintenance of latrines
- Cultural attitudes and norms

## FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The findings of open defecation in Bokaro reveal error in current national health data and warrant continued study, particularly with a larger, more comprehensive sample.

Open defecation poses a serious health concern; further research can be done to link its effects to associated illnesses, such as diarrhea, in Bokaro.

Our results also suggest possible correlations between open defecation and access to adequate sanitation facilities; additional research can expand upon this issue and further investigate any potential environmental impacts.



## REFERENCES

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