

# **Impacts of Hygiene Standards and Accessibility to Lavatories on Educational Outcomes in India**

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## **Abstract**

India is the most populous nation, has the largest democracy, and is one of the fastest-expanding economies. Education in India depends on several socio-economic factors: parental occupation, financial well-being, and access to modern amenities and facilities such as transportation, media, safety, and hygiene.

There are approximately 11,96,265 government schools in India that offer primary and secondary education however, approximately 35 million children in India do not attend school. The dropout rate in India at the secondary level is 12.6% while at the primary level, it is 3%. In India there are around 12,000 government schools that do not have a washroom, this creates a barrier to education. (Kayser, Rao, Jose and Raj, 2019).

In India school is approximately for 7 hours, having to go without access to sanitation or hygienic washrooms becomes difficult for children in rural areas. A total of 21,851 girls and 20,084 boys had dropped out of school the previous year (Mehta, 2022). After reaching pubescence, having no access to clean washrooms creates a roadblock for girls. The right to water and sanitation is a fundamental human right (Ortiz-Correa, Filho and Dinar, 2016).

Inequality in access to sanitation is directly related to inequality in access to education and healthcare. Due to lack of access to proper hygiene and sanitation in rural schools amongst other factors and the advantages of increase in income by domestic labor, parents are unable to see the advantage of education amongst youth in rural India (Jain, Agarwal, Billaiya & Devi 2017).

## **Introduction**

Education is a fundamental right for every child in India. In India, education is guaranteed to all children between the ages of 6 and 14. According to UNICEF, the Indian education system is the largest in the world with more than 1.5 million schools and 8.5 million teachers and 250 million children (Kayser, Rao, Jose and Raj, 2019). Education in India depends on several socio-economic factors such as the occupation of parents, financial well-being, access to modern amenities, and facilities such as transportation, media, safety, and hygiene. There are approximately 11,96,265 government schools in India that offer primary and secondary

education, and yet an estimated 35 million children don't attend school (Kayser, Rao, Jose and Raj, 2019).

Examining the dropouts rate in India, 1.4% of girls and 1.6% of boys in the primary level dropped out, while in the secondary level 12.3% of girls and 13% of boys dropped out of school (UDISE, published in 2022). A total of 21,851 girls and 20,084 boys had dropped out of school the previous year (Kayser, Rao, Jose and Raj, 2019)

Inequality in access to sanitation is directly related to inequalities in access to education and healthcare. Due to lack of access to proper hygiene and sanitation in rural schools parents are unable to see the advantage of education amongst youth in rural India. In India, the daily school session lasts roughly 7 hours, making it impossible for children, particularly girls, to go without utilizing amenities such as sanitary washrooms. There are around 12,000 government schools in India that do not have a washroom (Ortiz-Correa, Filho and Dinar, 2016). Insert transitional sentence that explains the significance of this statistic, like: "This is a critical issue that demands attention and which this project addresses."

This research examines the relationship between access to hygienic washrooms and is in turn related to education in India. In this project, I visited government schools in my hometown of Kolkata with the assistance of my non-profit organization, Maitri, to investigate whether the students have proper washrooms in their schools and explore the difficulties they face if they do not have access to hygienic washrooms. This research examines the relationship between access to hygienic washrooms and education in India. This project suggests that the availability of clean restrooms and appropriate menstrual hygiene management promotes children's school attendance and decreases the dropout rate. Girls and boys can both be encouraged to attend school and the dropout rate can be decreased.

## Literature Review

The growth of the economy and development of a country depend upon the education system of a particular country. A nation's most successful and ideal young generation comes from the education sector. Since education creates productive human capital, it also helps to boost total economic growth. The education sector has been identified as a primary source of productive growth in the Indian economy (Sreenivasulu, 2013). More, education is a human right protected by the Right to Education (RTE) in India's Constitution (86th Amendment, Article 21A: "The State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of six to fourteen years in such manner as the State may, by law, determine" (Bakshi and Kashyap, 1982). Further, the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act of 2009 made the standard process of gaining knowledge in schools a fundamental right of all children between the age group of 6 years to 14 years (Vishishtha and Jain, 2020).

One of the most important ways to improve the state of people in India from the low and middle-income population is to provide them with a better education (NITI Aayog, 2019). Over the past few years, the importance of education has been recognized by both the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Sustainable Development Goals, which focus on increasing student enrollment and improving the quality of education respectively (NITI Aayog, 2019)

The present state of education in India depicts the inequalities and privations experienced by low and middle-income groups (Vishishtha and Jain, 2020). According to the National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration, in 2016-17, 75.83% of eligible children were enrolled in schools at the elementary and secondary level, leaving 24.17% of children out of school. The average annual dropout rate at the secondary education level was 19.89% as reported by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) in 2016-2017 (NITI Aayog, 2019). India's alarmingly high dropout rates have been attributed to the quality of the curriculum, scarcity of resources, discrimination, ineffective implementation of the Right to Education, and failed education-related programs (Vishishtha and Jain, 2020).

Dropout rates in India are high because the education curriculum does not interest the students. It largely relies on textbooks which are sometimes troublesome since they are not consistently updated. The lack of lavatories further impedes practical understanding. Even when these facilities are available, teachers don't always carry out the practicals as needed. A significant issue is the infrastructure. Firstly, there are not enough schools to meet the demand and necessity. Secondly, the state of many current school buildings are deplorable and hazardous. Essentials like furniture, sanitary restrooms, safe drinking water, internet, medical rooms, and equipment for sports and labs are absent or insufficient (Sreenivasulu, 2013).

Inadequate sanitation facilities in schools massively affect the student's dropout rates. At a basic level, this deficiency indicates that schools are not safe for both boys and girls, who when entering adulthood especially need to have separate and adequate facilities for menstruation. The lack of proper facilities discourages them from going to school and consequently, they tend to drop out (Lizzette, 2000).

Poor sanitation in schools disproportionately affects girls, and generally fosters an unfriendly and unhygienic school environment (Agarwal & Agarwal, 2010). According to the World Health Organization's MDGs, the availability of clean water and hygienic washrooms in schools is vital for the achievement of universal primary education, reduction of child mortality, and the promotion of gender equality (Mahon and Fernandes, 2010).

India has consistently come up against disputes and conflicts around the issues of class, caste, creed, language, and gender and the education system is no exception. Everyone is protected from these types of discrimination by the RTE in its section 8(a) subclause (c), and yet slum children continue to face discrimination from their peers and teachers following which they choose to drop out. In a school where 58 Ghasiya youth were forced to sit in a separate class because they were members of a minority group, a student stated the following:

“The teacher tells us to sit on the other side. If we sit with others, she scolds us and asks us to sit separately ... The teacher doesn't sit with us because she says we 'are dirty.' The other children also call us dirty every day so sometimes we get angry and hit them” (Aggarwal, 2014).

## Method

With the help of the non-profit organization Maitri, which aims to help the less-privileged by distributing necessary items, I visited two schools run by the government in Kolkata, where I interviewed students first through self-administered surveys and then through focus groups. Before participating, the parents of the students signed a consent form to ensure their safety. Each participant received a questionnaire to fill out about the washrooms of their schools and their attendance. The surveys were followed up with focus groups to discuss how the students of different classes feel about the washrooms in their school and the hygiene maintained in their school.

The questionnaire included questions like:

- Are you a male or a female?
- What is your age?
- Which class are you in?
- Are clean washrooms available in your school?
- Do you have access to soap, towels, sanitary napkins, and other essentials?
- Do you resist going to the washroom in your school?
- Do you have access to washrooms in your house? If not, do you have a communal washroom in your locality?
- Do your parents allow you to use the washrooms in your school?
- Do you want your school washroom to be cleaner? Express your views.
- Have you ever been absent knowing that the washrooms are dirty?

After receiving all the responses, I analyzed the data by manually segregating the data according to gender and preferences for clean washrooms.

## Results

I interviewed 250 students, 100 of which were girls and 150 were boys. The students were between the ages of twelve and fifteen from grades seven to eleven.

Approximately half of the participants, 52% reported that they have been absent knowing that there are unhygienic washrooms in their school (Figure 1). More than half of the students,

80%, agreed that the restrooms in their schools needed to be cleaned, and 70% of the participants avoided using them. The majority of participants reported that they choose not to go to school because of the dirty and unsanitary condition of the restrooms and the lack of basic amenities. The majority (70%) of girls said that they do not use the restroom for six to seven hours when in schools because, throughout their menstrual cycle, they do not have access to sanitary napkins, which is difficult and dangerous for them (Figure 2). All participants expressed the desire that their restrooms be frequently cleaned and stocked with the essential supplies such as soap dispensers, toilet paper and sanitary napkins to make using the restroom agreeable.

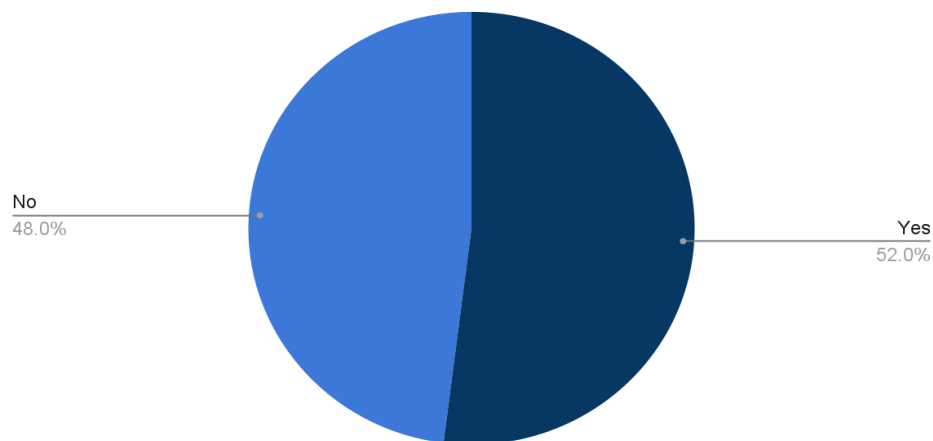


Figure 1. Percentage of students who are absent from school due to unhygienic washrooms

All the students reported a desire for cleaner restrooms in their school so that their school days would be simpler and easier. Because of the unsanitary and unhygienic conditions of the restrooms, more than half of the students surveyed in this study do not use the restrooms at their schools.

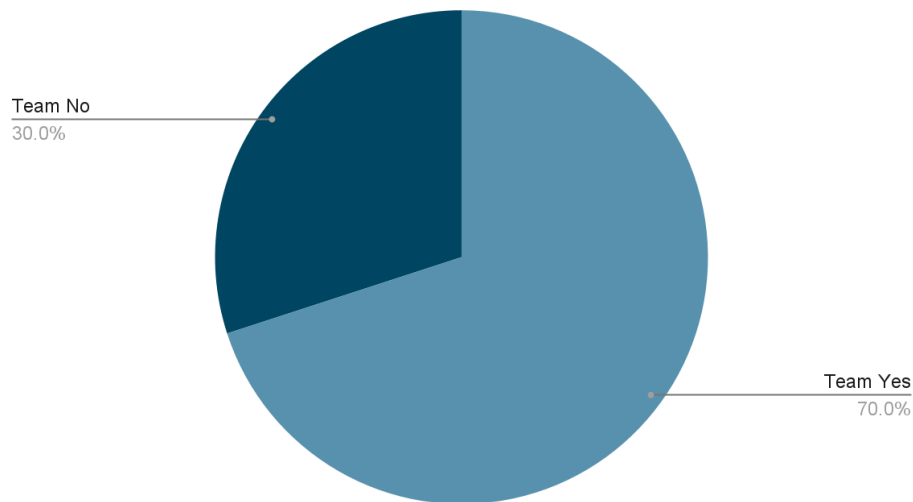


Figure 2. Percentage of girls who do not use washrooms when in school

These results suggest that unclean restrooms have a critical impact on dropout rates. Out of 250 students, 175 students resist using the washrooms in their schools and do not come to school knowing that there are dirty washrooms and 75 students do not resist using the washrooms. From this we can see that more than half of the students want cleaner washrooms in their schools and they themselves stop attending schools due to unclean washrooms.

## Discussion

The students described that, at their schools, they lack access to soap, towels, functional restrooms, and sanitary napkins. Some claimed that the community restrooms are cleaner than the restrooms in their respective schools, so they wait until they return home at the end of the school day to use them. Further, some students disclosed that their parents would not let them use the restrooms at school because of how filthy they were, which contributed to their skipping classes and even dropping out.

This study makes evident that while a number of interconnected social, economic, educational, and cultural factors influence dropout rates, a critical factor is the availability of hygiene and clean washrooms in schools. This especially true for females, as girls often have a poorer educational performance due to such conditions. My findings reveal that the unavailability of sanitary lavatories contributes to a decrease in retention which leads to the increased dropout rates in India. This is a critical issue, because this trend can create long term inefficiency in the Indian education system and become a significant threat to its economy (Sreenivasulu, 2013).

If the state of washrooms in schools can be improved, then students will not only feel safe to use the washrooms but also will be more likely to attend school regularly, which will contribute to reduced dropout rates. The growth of the economy and the development of a country depends upon the education system of that particular country. Addressing the present shortcomings in school's infrastructures should be a priority of India's education development, which aims to improve the number of students attending school and motivate them to complete their schooling (Sreenivasulu, 2013).

A limitation of this research is that it was conducted on a small sample size of 250 students, but it indicates an issue on a macro level. Researchers should further look into this matter, to investigate if it is also a deep concern of students in other parts of India who are likely to face the same issue regarding washrooms. This research also raises different questions for other projects, especially with respect to what can be done to solve this problem in the country.

Among factors such as curriculum structure, legal and political issues, and gender discrimination, one of the main reasons behind India's startlingly high dropout rates is the unsanitary condition of the washrooms. In the hope to change the same, I suggest that the government should allocate resources to improving school infrastructure, ensuring there are separate facilities for boys and girls, and that they are sanitary and supplied. There is a reciprocal effect between the micro and the macro, and the education of India's children can only be accomplished on both an individual and collective level once opportunities and proper conditions are given to them in their schools. Sanitation, like education, is always a profitable investment for the nation (Vishishtha and Jain, 2020)

## **Conclusion**

This research concluded that the importance of a hygienic washroom in schools is essential for enhancing children's overall quality of life as well as academic performance (Joshi and Amadi, 2013). It confirms previous literature that inadequate sanitary facilities in schools have a significant impact on student dropout rates. Fundamentally, this inadequacy shows that schools are unsafe for both boys and especially for girls, who require separate and proper menstruation facilities. They are discouraged from attending school because of a lack of adequate facilities. Poor sanitation in schools disproportionately impacts girls and generates an unfavorable and unsanitary educational atmosphere in general. The provision of clean water and sanitary washrooms in schools is critical for achieving universal primary education, reducing child mortality, and promoting gender equality, according to the World Health Organization's MDGs.

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