

Women are more likely to expect social sanctions for open defecation: field evidence from India

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HIGHLIGHTS

- Majority perceived the risk of informal sanctions related to OD, such as verbal reprimand, advice, and gossip.
- People were more likely to expect social sanctions for OD when they believe that toilet use becoming more prevalent in their communities.
- This relationship is stronger for women than for men



BACKGROUND

Sanitation in India

- Open defecation (OD) in India has drawn global attention for its negative impacts on health, economics, and human rights.
- Having to OD is related to increased psychosocial stress due to decreased privacy, increased risk of sexual harassment, and potential social sanctions such as gossip, particularly among women¹⁻³.

Social Sanctions

- Social sanctions such as peer monitoring can effectively promote toilet use but could also induce psychosocial stress (e.g., shame, guilt, and fear) for those who did not have access to toilets^{4,5}.
- As toilet use gradually becoming a descriptive norm, individuals might internalize the norm abiding behavior as 'moral' and expect social sanction for deviating from the norm⁶⁻⁸..

RQ1: Does the perceived prevalence of toilet use is associated with the likelihood of perceiving the risk of sanctions for OD?

RQ2: Does this relationship differs by gender?

MEASURES

Perceived risk of social sanctions

“If someone from your community defecated in the open, would anyone do or say anything in response to that?”

Types of sanctions

“What would be done in response to someone who defecated in the open in your community?” (multiple-choice)

- Informal** {
 - Advice
 - verbal reprimand
 - Gossip
 - fines
- Formal** {
 - loss of public benefits such as ration cards
 - violence

Perceived prevalence of toilet use

“Think about ten members of your community. Out of them, how many do you think use a toilet every time to defecate?”

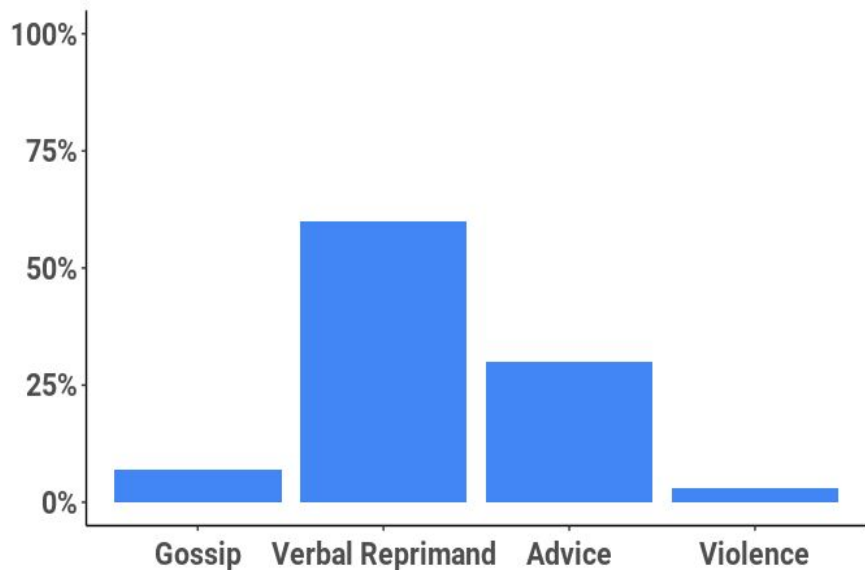
- 0 = no one -> not prevalent at all
- ...
- 10 = all -> extremely prevalent

Study area

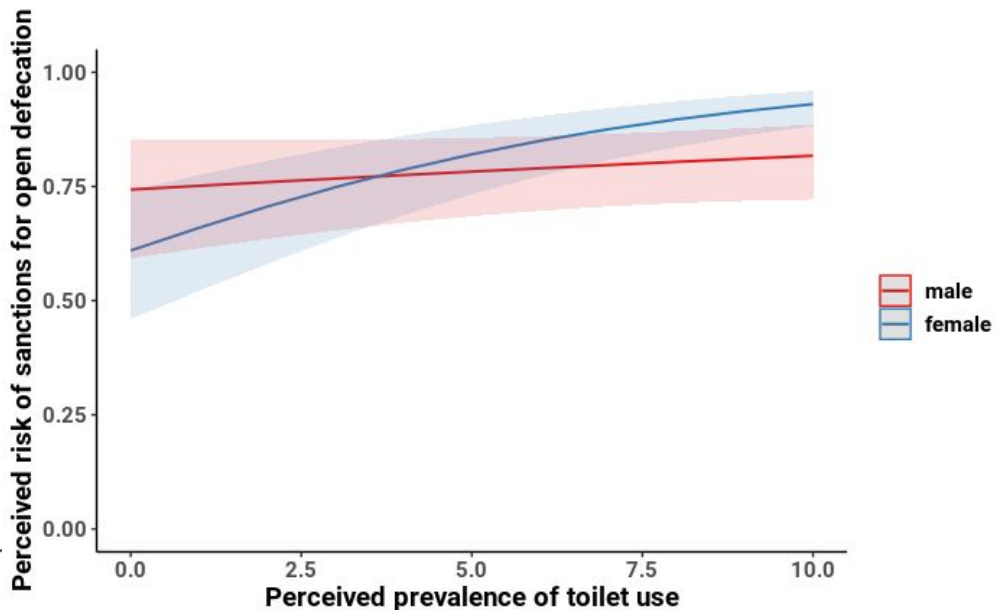


RESULTS

Out of 2427 respondents from 75 communities in peri-urban Tamil Nadu India, 77% perceived a social sanction (79% women vs 74% men).



Moderation analysis showed women were more likely to perceive the risk of social sanctions for OD when they believed more people used a toilet but not men.



DISCUSSION

- In India, it is often considered a dishonor to one's family if women are seen practicing OD. Having to OD could indicate absence or inadequate access to sanitation, which has overarching impacts on women's sanitation across life stages.
- These negative experiences, both external, such as shaming or gossip, as well as internal, such as guilt or shame, may have long-term impacts on mental health and well-being.
- Our findings emphasize the need to
 - improve toilet access for women especially given the changing scheme of national and regional initiative and toilet use is becoming prevalent in a community.
 - develop gendered sanitation programs when leveraging social influence

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS & REFERENCE

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