

HEALTH AND SOCIAL IMPACTS OF OPEN DEFECATION ON RURAL COMMUNITIES IN FCT, ABUJA NIGERIA: THE OPTION OF SOCIAL AND BEHAVIOUR CHANGE COMMUNICATION (SBCC)

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Abstract

The practice of open defecation is a global development and health issue facing developing nations. The purpose of the study is to highlight the health and social impacts of open defecation on rural communities in FCT Abuja, Nigeria. Consequently, it is the contention of the researcher that Social and Behaviour Change Communication has pivotal roles to play in curbing the menace of open defecation in the Federal Capital Territory Abuja.

Keywords: *Health, Social, Impacts, Open defecation, Abuja.*

1. RESEARCH PROBLEM

The menace of open defecation in the Federal Capital Territory Abuja, Nigeria should undoubtedly attract the attention of development communication scholars and specialists in Nigeria and FCT in particular.

Open defecation continues to represent a critical health issue globally, affecting almost 1 billion people worldwide and contributing significantly to an estimated 842,000 people who die yearly from sanitation related disease (OSUMANU et al., 2019). Back home in Nigeria and especially in FCT Abuja, the problem of open defecation is arguably worrisome.

According to the 2018 National Outcome Routine Mapping (NORM) report:

47 million Nigerians practice open defecation. This is to show that, at least one out of four Nigerians engage in open defecation. Unfortunately, Nigeria loses N455 billion (US\$ 1.3 billion) annually due to poor sanitation.

Open defecation is the human practice of defecating or excreting outside rather than making use of toilets. It involves defecating in

street gutters, behind bushes or open bodies of water.

Explaining further, (WHO) states that, open defecation contaminates sources of drinking water and spreads diseases such as cholera, diarrhoea and dysentery. WHO estimates that inadequate sanitation causes 432,000 diarrhoea deaths annually. Apart from the horrible city smell and the spread of communicable diseases like polio, typhoid fever and hepatitis, open defecation poses serious danger to society and those practicing it are prone to attacks by wild animals while defecating in bushes, they are also vulnerable to being kidnapped.

In a 2018, the UNICEF Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) survey conducted by the Nigerian Ministry of Water Resources and the National Bureau of statistics, showed that the impediment to proper hygiene in Nigeria is the high prevalence of open defecation. The result of this survey placed Nigeria as the African Country with the highest population practicing open defecation and second globally next to India.

In an attempt to address this prevailing global challenge, the United Nations (UN) General Assembly, on July 28, 2010, through resolution 64/292, declared clean and safe water and sanitation fundamental human rights, that are basically essential to the realization and attainment of all other human rights (UNITED NATIONS, 2015; PRÜSS-USTÜN et al., 2014).

A study conducted by Coffey, in NGWU, 2017, lamented the high rate in the practice of open defecation in rural communities which remains stubbornly underspread, with several dire consequences affecting human health and environment alike. This barbaric practice kills

babies and impedes the physical and cognitive development of surviving children (GLANZ, et al, 2008).

It also has significant negative externalities and releases germs into the environment, which pose serious harm to both the rich and the poor in the society (MARTEAU et al., 2012; AKINGBULU, 2017).

Corroborating the above, News Bank in KALU, et al, 2020, avers that:

Nigeria over the past 15 years has a record of being part of the top 5 countries with the problem of open defecation globally. A cumulative report on the ratio of people engaging in open defecation across Nigeria states that the North Central has a total of 53.9%, South-East has 22.4%, North East has 21.8%, South has 17.9%, South West has 28.0% and North West 10.3%, covering all geographical regions.

It is our contention that the practice of open defecation among FCT residents has debilitating consequences on the development of Abuja. According to (ODOGWU, 2022), the Federal Capital Territory Administration recently declared that:

One in every three FCT citizens practices open defecation; that is, more than 30 percent of Abuja residents answer nature's call in a primitive, unwholesome practice.

Although there is a coterie of scholarly evidence on open defecation in the past on Nigeria, none of these has really tried to examine the health and social impacts of open defecation in the rural communities of FCT Abuja.

Our purpose, therefore, is to highlight the causes and implications of open defecation among residents of FCT Abuja, Nigeria.

2. CAUSES OF OPEN DEFECATION IN FCT ABUJA, NIGERIA

According to (NGWU, 2017, p. 203), there are several reasons why the practice of open defecation has continued to unabated in developing countries, especially in the rural areas; it can be voluntary or semi-voluntary, but in most cases, it is due to the limited access to alternatives (i.e. modern toilets) and the unavailability of clean, safe, and attractive

toilets at the very time of performing the act. Because of the filthy, dark, or foul-smelling toilets the personal safety of the user is at risk as criminals are known to gather and wait for possible victims.

According to (OKUKU, 2020), other reasons of open defecation in Nigeria are the following: poverty, lack of toilets and the lack of awareness of the dangers of open defecation.

Similarly, (AKINDAYO, n.d.) avers that other causes to open defecation in Nigeria include:

Ignorance and primitive lifestyles; lack of water supply; lack of necessary technology (especially in rural areas) for appropriate toilet models; poor maintenance of facilities and the heavy financial requirement in tackling the menace (Nigeria needs an estimated NGN 959b (US 2.7 bn) to end open defecation b 2025).

3. IMPACT OF OPEN DEFECATION IN FCT ABUJA, NIGERIA

The impact of open defecation in Nigeria is as enunciated by (OKUKU, 2020), thus:

Impact on Health.

Open defecation affects the health of individuals. About 88% of diarrhoea diseases reported among children in Nigeria are linked to open defecation. There is also evidence that children living in areas where open defecation is practiced experience restarted growth. Additionally, close contact with human faeces could give rise to other diseases such as typhoid worm infestation and cholera, all of which are contacted through water ingestion or food contaminated with faeces. In 2018 (January to June) Nigeria recorded 11,696 cases of cholera, with 0.79% deaths.

Impact on the Economy

Open defecation affects the economy. The water and Sanitation Programme reported that due to poor sanitation NGN455 billion is lost annually in Nigeria due to an unhygienic environment. It could be argued that in the event of a disease outbreak, the economy will likely be crippled, as the government will have

to spend more money containing the outbreak of the disease rather than using it to improve the standard of living for the population. This shows that open defecation causes economic loss through disease outbreaks on the residents of FCT Abuja (OKUKU, 2020; THE WORLD BANK, 2012).

Impact on Agriculture

Open defecation affects agriculture. A study by (SINGH et al, 2007) concluded that due to open defecation practices on farmlands, some bacteria from faeces can inhibit the germination of seed crops. Agriculture is one of the major sources of living for most residents of FCT Abuja. This crop inhibition due to the infection of the soil by the practice of open defecation suggests that fewer or no crops may be produced by farmers in FCT Abuja.

Impact on Water Bodies

Open defecation contaminates water sources. During the rainy season there is the possibility of the rain to carry the faeces from the farmlands or fields into the streams, rivers or other water sources (UNICEF, n.d.). This pollutes the water sources and, if ingested, could cause human diseases as cholera (and it also affects the aquatic life).

Impact on the Environment

Open defecation affects the environment. Open defecation could cause global warming, as a result of the release of gas (methane-greenhouse gas) from the faeces into the atmosphere (EL-FADEL & MASSOUD, 2001, OKUKU, 2020). These raised climatic temperature levels could make air pollution worse, causing respiratory infections and other diseases (DENCHAK , 2022). Consequently, there is the need to protect the environment by putting an end to open defecation in FCT Abuja.

Impact on Security

Open defecation puts the security of women and girls at risk (OKUKU, 2020). There is evidence that girls and women who go outdoors to pass faeces encounter sexual molestation, rape and even death (O'REILLY, 2016; TONG, 2017; THE INDIAN EXPRESS, 2018).

4. HEALTH AND SOCIAL IMPACTS OF OPEN DEFECATION ON RURAL COMMUNITIES IN FCT ABUJA: THE OPTION OF SOCIAL AND BEHAVIOUR CHANGE COMMUNICATION (SBCC)

Communication plays a crucial role in creating awareness, promoting and proffering solutions to developmental and health issues confronting the world today. This goes beyond the traditional function of transmitting relevant information to engage people in order to address the behavioural and attitudinal issues that interact in-between.

As observed by (RIMAL & LAPINSKI, 2009), most intervention efforts to achieve behavioural change are usually acts of communication. Apart from building public health infrastructures and providing services, there is a need to involve communication efforts in changing individual and social behaviour, that may prevent the effective utilization of these infrastructures in order to ensure that there is a demand for public health services (UNICEF, 2014).

This underscores the importance of Social and Behaviour Change Communication programme. KALU et al, 2020 states that open defecation is deeply rooted in the culture and tradition of some Nigerian communities. Therefore, behaviour change is most required in order to eradicate open defecation, because simply supporting communities to build latrine may be insufficient to make them use the facilities (GERTLER et al 2015) as is the case in India and Indonesia (ODIAGIRI et al., 2017; O'REILLY et al., 2017; GALAN et al., 2013). Adopting Social and Behaviour Change Communication appears to be key to eradicate open defecation in FCT Abuja. (MoHFW, 2013) explain that:

Social and behaviour change communication (SBCC) is a framework that uses the strategies of advocacy, behaviour change communication (BCC) and community mobilization to trigger both individual and social change. It uses the 360-degree approach, which is focused not just on mass media but it integrates both mid-media and inter-personal communication. It systematically addresses

the complex processes integral to planning, designing implementing, monitoring and evaluating health communication.

SBCC represents a systematic application of the interactive theory-based and research driven communication processed strategies in order to address the tipping points for change at the individual, community and social levels. A tipping point refers to the dynamics of social change, where trends rapidly evolve into permanent change. It can be driven by a naturally occurring event or a story determinant for change, such as the political will that provides the final push to “tip over” barriers to change. Tipping points describe how momentum builds up to a point where change gains strength and becomes unstoppable (C-CHANGE, n.d.).

Why should there be a shift from Behaviour Change Communication (BCC) to SBCC?

Over the years, there has been a change in how health and development programmes think about human behaviours. Approaches to behaviour change have expanded beyond a focus on the individual, in order to emphasise sustainable social change. SBCC looks at a problem from multiple sides by analysing personal, societal and environment factors in order to find the most effective tipping points for a sustainable change. While BCC can achieve individual empowerment, SBCC also uses strategies that influence the physical, socio-economic and cultural environment to facilitate healthy norms and choices and remove barriers. In some situations, advocacy or social mobilization for policy change may support stronger and a more immediate permanent change than the campaigns that target individual behaviours. SBCC methods aim at improving advocacy or mobilization for social actions, along with BCC for personal changes. BCC is thus part of SBCC, while SBCC build on BCC. (C-CHANGE, n.d.).

5. CONCLUSIONS

The practice of open defecation is a global development and health issue that should attract the attention of development communication

scholars and specialists in Nigeria and in particular FCT Abuja.

Open defecation represents the human practice of defecating or excreting outside rather than making use of toilets. It involves defecating in the street gutters, behind bushes or open bodies of water. It has debilitating health and social impacts on the rural communities of the Federal Capital Territory Abuja. There is therefore the urgent need by the FCT Administration to ensure that the menace of open defecation is curtailed. One sure way of curbing open defecation in FCT is by employing the strategies of Social and Behaviour Change Communication (SBCC) in order to influence both the individual and social change.

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