



**THE WOMEN'S HEALTH AND EDUCATION CENTER**  
*NGO in Special Consultative Status with ECOSOC of the United Nations*

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## **Ensuring Safe Drinking-Water & Sanitation For All: Our Efforts**

Do you know that Women in some parts of India have to walk minimum 5 miles each side to fetch just 1 pot of water? It's 2023 and it's still not changed. Irrespective of the age or whether they are pregnant or have a newborn child on their back - they still carry water pots on their heads and walk 5 miles. Walking in itself is a challenge but walking in your periods or when you are pregnant or carry a 10-20-30 pounds child on your back is a challenge never faced by Men.

Urgent action is needed globally AND locally to achieve safe and sustainably managed water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) for all, in order to prevent devastating impacts on health of millions of people. The world is seriously off-track to achieve Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6 on water and sanitation for all, by 2030. We at **Women's Health and Education Center (WHEC)** are dedicated to the well-being of all people and guided by science. We support this initiative, WASH in schools, in Kerala, India. WASH-related health burden ranging from – child death, diarrheal disease, enteric infections, malnutrition, maternal and neonatal infections, infections from unsafe healthcare waste management and antimicrobial resistance to name a few. Impacts on well-being: Dignity, personal safety (fear, anxiety, stress), school attendance, livelihoods (economic productivity, poverty).

We at WHEC integrate WASH into health programs such as focusing on antimicrobial resistance, cholera prevention and control, emergencies, infection prevention and control, maternal, neonatal and child health, non-communicable diseases, nutrition and universal health coverage can increase synergies and impacts.

WHEC aims to – support health sectors and health promoting schools in effectively addressing WASH-related health risks; and assist non-health sectors in understanding and maximizing the positive health impacts of their work.

**Water & Sanitation – Essential to Improve Maternal and Child Health**

The provision of WASH in healthcare facilities serves to prevent infections and spread of disease, protect staff and patients, and uphold the dignity of vulnerable populations including pregnant women and disabled. Yet, many healthcare facilities in low-resource settings lack basic WASH services, compromising the ability to provide safe care and presenting serious health risks to those seeking treatment. Open defecation & unsafe drinking water perpetuates a vicious cycle of disease and poverty. There is further need for research on the links between sanitation and health, and on the operation of the sanitation service chain and optimal methods for implementation.

WHEC works with civil society, Member States and UN System, to promote health systematically, and focuses on eliminating hunger, promoting food security, food safety, and healthy diets, preventing and controlling transboundary diseases, zoonoses, and antimicrobial resistance (AMR), to protect the livelihoods of farmers from the impacts of plant and animal diseases, and to increase the sustainability and resilience of agrifood systems, with **One Health** benefits. WHEC promotes One Health approach.

### **Exploring the Relationship between Sanitation and Mental Health and Social Well-being:**

Women and especially young girls are getting sexually harassed, molested and even raped while they are trying to just access basic necessities for their survival. Because of unavailability of Bathrooms in the rural communities they are forced to defecate in open. But they cannot even do that after the sunrise so they wake up early in the morning before sunrise and walk in groups to defecate in open. Even then early morning around 4 am still they get raped by Men or lurked by Men.

When people *perceive* or *experience* a lack of privacy and safety, during open defecation or when using sanitation infrastructure, this can negatively influence their mental and social well being. The researchers have found that perceptions and experiences of privacy and safety are influenced by contextual and individual factors, such as location of sanitation facilities and user's gender identity, respectively. Privacy and safety require thorough examination when developing sanitation interventions and policy to ensure a positive influence on the user's mental and social well-being. The world has seen a dramatic increase in out-of-school rates, for both girls and boys in developing countries.

Our Key Areas of Actions:

1. **Country Support.** Empower countries through technical cooperation and capacity building on national policies and regulatory frameworks and national target-setting.
2. **Evidence and monitoring.** Monitor, research and report reliable and credible WASH

data to inform policies and programs including WASH risk factors and burden of disease.

3. **Coordination and Advocacy.** Coordinate and engage with multisectoral partners, global and regional platforms to strengthen WASH regulation policies.
4. **WASH in health programs.** Support coordinated actions between WASH and health programs to increase synergies and impacts.
5. **Response to emerging issues.** Respond to issues such as climate change and WASH, and the impact of water scarcity on public health.

Here is just 1 little example of a girl from Rajasthan India.

A 12 year old girl got her periods in school. When she realized that she doesn't have the sanitary napkin or extra cloth (coz not everyone can afford pads). She decided to go back home. When she was walking back home in the middle of the day - 3 Men came on a bike and picked her up - raped her, hit her and threw her in the farm .. All this while she was already bleeding from her periods. She somehow found the courage to walk and went to closest house for help. She narrated her story to this lady and described who did this to her. This lady instead of calling her parents called those same Men again. Who again took her and locked her and raped her again several times. These Men belonged to the upper caste of that village so they assumed they had the highest authority in that village. Just to be able to get those Men arrested was a huge battle for the poor family. This is just a story of 1 girl trying to access her basic rights of education and hygiene.

Providing basic water and sanitation facilities to girls & womens shouldn't be just a job just for the Feminists but for all Humans as these are BASIC HUMAN RIGHTS that ONLY WOMEN HAVE NO ACCESS TO.