

Title: Impact of COVID-19 on Pre-existing Sanitation Inequalities in India

Authors: Jenna Swetz, Morgan Heinz, Hema Pandey

Abstract Text:

Water access, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) procedures and practices are vital for the prevention of disease and for the promotion of good physical and cognitive development. In India, pre-existing issues in sanitation and sanitation inequalities, in particular access to menstrual supplies and toiletries, have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. In order to help the people of India and learn more about their culture, I joined a virtual global health internship that was offered by Child Family Health International (CFHI). While I initially joined the internship program to help others, I had a thorough understanding that my main responsibility was to learn as much as I could about Indian culture and the healthcare issues without overstepping any boundaries. Over the next month, I conducted multiple virtual interviews with WASH specialists in India, created an infographic to describe the importance of toilet usage, and created a report that detailed my research into sanitation as a determinant of health and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on sanitation inequalities. In my report, I recommended to CFHI that an increase in communication between rural governments and state departments, the creation of sanitation clubs in rural areas, and mobile sanitary napkin stations would help reduce the impact of sanitation inequalities. After completing the internship, I felt that I had a better understanding of Indian culture, Indian healthcare, and cultural humility. Going forward, I plan to use my better understanding of cultural humility in an epidemiological setting. I will use what I learned in future interactions with specialists and researchers in different countries in a manner that is respectful to their unique culture.