Child Feces Disposal Practices in 24 countries

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Introduction

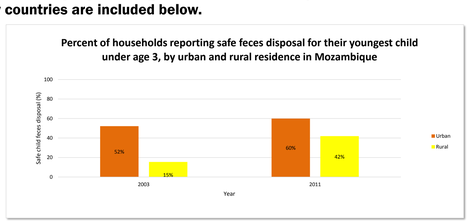
One of the Post 2015 Sustainable Development Goal proposed targets is, "By 2025, no one practices open defecation." In order to reach this target, no one, child or adult, can have their feces left on the ground. Currently, the WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Program (JMP) for Water Supply and Sanitation estimates are based on nationally representative surveys and censuses recording one type of sanitation coverage per household mentioned by the survey/census respondent. As the JMP noted in their 2008 report, there are limitations to these data because intra-household disparities, not only between adult household members but also across age, may not be tracked. Due to their developmental status and the safety concerns of caregivers and children, young children may not use a toilet or latrine, even if their household has access to one. In order to stimulate conversation and develop practical program and policy guidance, WSP and UNICEF partnered to create 24 country profiles outlining current child feces disposal practices.

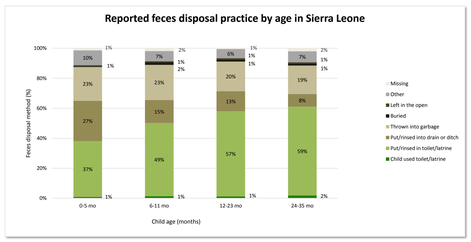
Methodology

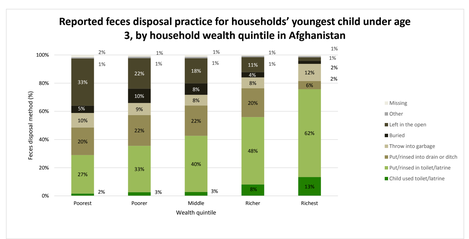
To develop the country profiles, the latest and earliest available Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) Child Module or Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) Individual Module with child feces disposal data for each country were analyzed. Responses to the survey question, "The last time your child defecated, where were the stools disposed of?" were analyzed. The fact that the MICS data are for all children in the age under three and the DHS data are only for the youngest per household under, means that there are some limitations on the comparability of the MICS and DHS. Analyses were restricted to children under three, except those where age was the background characteristic of interest. Dataset specific sample weights were used to restore representativeness, and the complex stratified cluster sample design was taken into account using cluster as the primary sampling unit and stratifying by urban/rural residence.

Results

Marginalized households, such as rural and poorer households, and those with younger children consistently reported higher rates of unsafe disposal of child feces. The results from a few countries are included below.







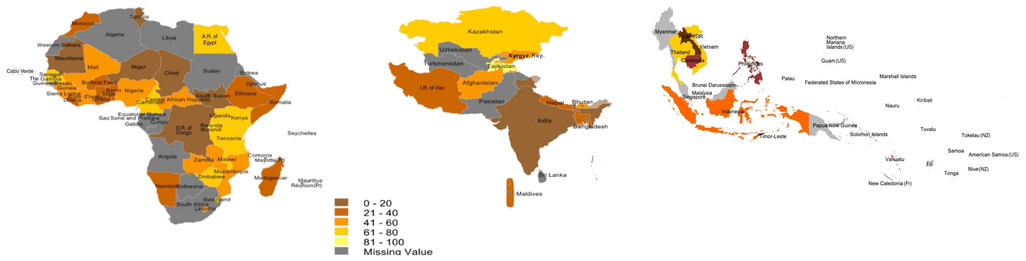
What Is "Safe Disposal" or "Improved Disposal" of a Child's Feces?

The safest way to dispose of a child's feces is to help them use a toilet or latrine or, for very young children, to put or rinse their feces into a toilet or latrine. For the purposes of this poster, these disposal methods are referred to as safe, whereas other methods are considered unsafe. By definition, safe disposal is only possible where there is access to a toilet or latrine. When a child's feces is put or rinsed into an "improved" toilet or latrine, this is termed "improved child feces disposal."

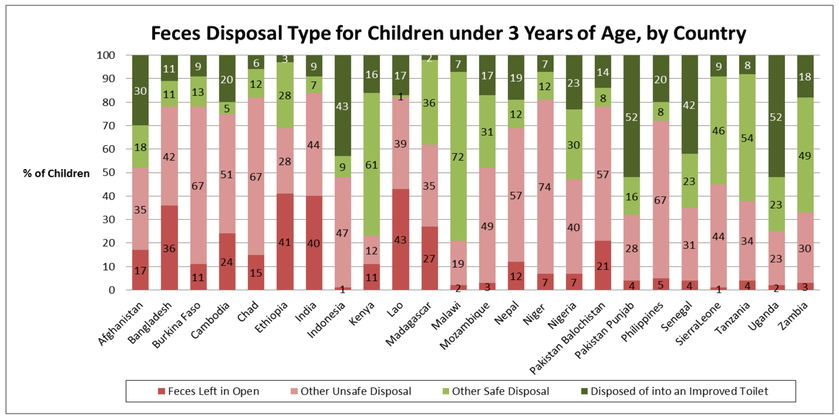
Key Findings

- Over 50% of households with children under 3 in 14 of the 24 countries reported that the feces of their youngest child under age three were not deposited into any kind of toilet or latrine—i.e. they were unsafely disposed.
- Even among households with improved toilets or latrines, all countries reported some unsafe child feces disposal behavior.
- Young children had worse access than the general population to improved facilities in 22 of the 24 countries.
- Higher rates of unsafe child feces disposal are found for households that open defecate, those in rural areas, those that are poorer, and those with younger children.

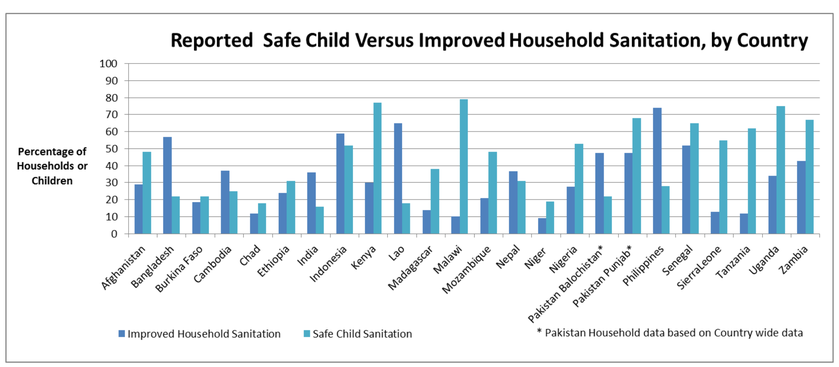
In only 10 of these 24 countries ,the majority of children under three had their feces safely disposed of.



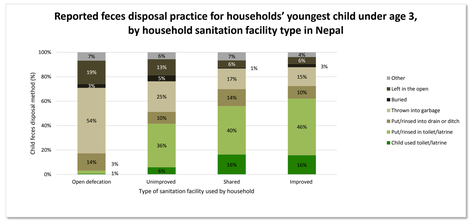
In 12 of the 24 countries, the feces of more than 10 percent of children were reported to be left in the open

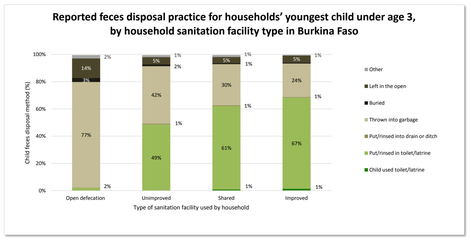


Young children had worse access to improved sanitation than the general population in all but two of the countries.



Unsafe child feces disposal behaviors were reported even among households with improved sanitation, in all countries, as illustrated by the examples below.

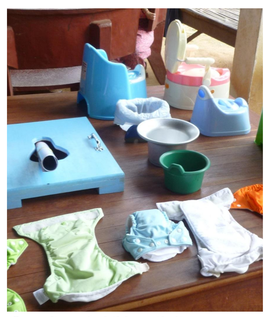




Ideas for Consideration

Given the relatively few programs focusing on children's sanitation globally, there is not a strong evidence base of effective strategies for increasing the safe disposal of child feces. Nevertheless, organizations and governments interested in improving the management of children's feces could consider:

- Conducting formative research to understand the determinants of and barriers to safe child feces disposal;
- Strengthening efforts to change the behavior of caregivers
- Exploring opportunities to integrate child sanitation into existing interventions that target caregivers of young children
- Partnering with the private sector to improve feces management tools, and
- Improving the enabling environment for management of children's feces, by including related criteria in open defecation free verification protocols, sanitation policies, strategies, and monitoring mechanisms.



Sampling of child sanitation products discussed with caregivers during Water SHED consumer research in Cambodia.

We're interested in your thoughts.

Please join us on Friday , October 17th for a side session, "What to do with Infant Poo?"

In addition, if you have thoughts to share, or know of a program which is encouraging the safe disposal of child feces, please contact the WSP at erand@worldbank.org or UNICEF at WASH@unicef.org so that we can integrate your information into future program guidance.