

93% OF RURAL INDIANS HAVE ACCESS TO TOILETS: SANITATION SURVEY

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A new government-commissioned survey has found that 93.1% of rural Indian households now have access to toilets, in comparison to 77% last year.

The second edition of the National Annual Rural Sanitation Survey (NARSS) also recorded encouraging data with regard to toilet usage and open defecation, finding that 96.5% of people who had access to toilets use them. The Centre's flagship Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, launched in 2014, aims to completely eliminate open defecation in the country by October 2, 2019.

The NARSS figures seem to contradict the findings of a recent independent survey by the research institute for compassionate economics (r.i.c.e.), which found that 44% of people in rural Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan still defecate in the open.

NARSS 2018-19 was conducted between November 2018 and February 2019, covering 92,040 households in 6,136 villages.

Third party oversight

The survey was commissioned by the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation, the nodal Ministry in charge of Swachh Bharat's rural arm, and conducted by a third party agency, Kantar Public, with oversight by an expert working group.

The Ministry's own tracking system claims that 98.9% of households across the country have access to toilets, with only four states — Goa, Odisha, Telangana and West Bengal — falling short of 100% coverage. Ministry data show that 5.54 lakh villages claim to be open defecation free or ODF.

The new NARSS survey has found that 90.7% of these villages can be confirmed as ODF.

There is no State-wise data available for NARSS 2018-19 as yet.

A late 2018 survey by the Centre for Policy Research's Accountability Initiative covering 1,558 households in 157 villages in Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan, tracked changes between 2014 and 2018.

It found that while there was a huge increase in toilet ownership, it did not translate into a proportionate increase in usage.

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