

Intensify Education on Child Faeces Disposal

There is need to intensify education on safe disposal of child's faeces in Ghana. This is because a recent report from the Ghana Statistical Service, the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS 2006) indicates that only about 43% of nursing parents in Ghana dispose their child's faeces safely.

This may be an indication that many Ghanaians still think child's faeces are harmless. But this is contrary to expert knowledge that child's faeces are not different from adult faeces and are also poisonous.

Human contacts with faeces may result in several illnesses including diarrhoea, the second largest killer of children, worms, trachoma, which is the world's number one cause of preventable blindness, and acute respiratory infections such as pneumonia.

According to the Ghana Health Service, more than 70% of reported illnesses at the OPD are water, sanitation and hygiene related. This may also imply that when people adopt safe hygiene practices, the rate of infections can reduce since the principal routes of transmission of infectious (diarrhoeal) diseases may be broken.

The MICS 2006 report, released by the Ghana Statistical Service in June 2008, identified six different child faeces disposal methods in the country, only two of which were safe disposal methods.

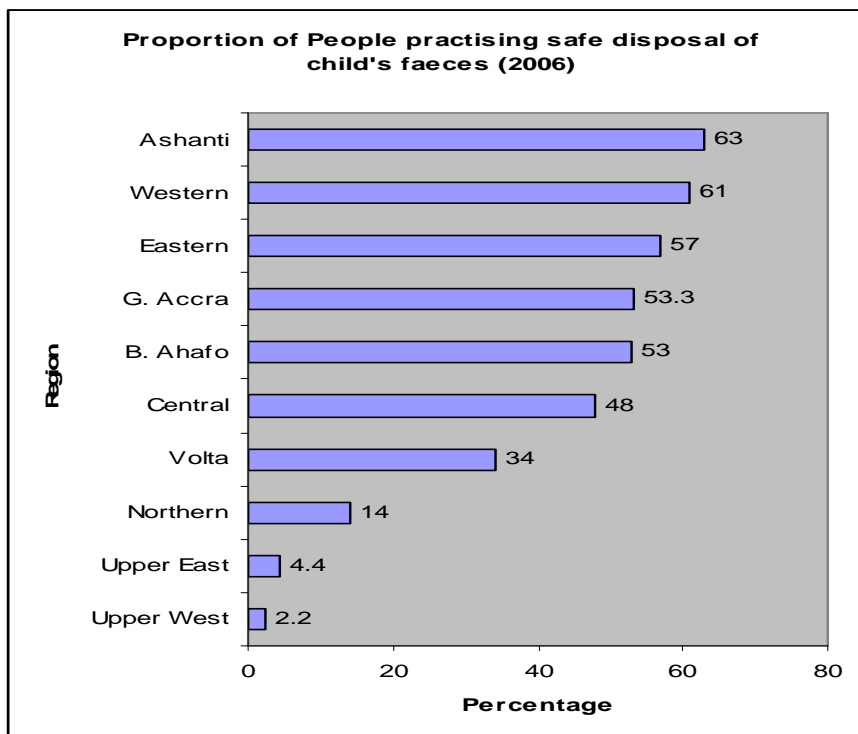
According to the report, about two out of five nursing parents or guardians either rinsed the child's faeces into a toilet or latrine or managed to make the child use the toilet itself. In this case the child's faeces are not exposed to the environment and thus kept out of human contact.

The unsafe methods are instances where the child's faeces are rinsed into drains, thrown into garbage containers or heaps, buried or left in the open. When critically analyzed, there is no difference between these unsafe methods and open defecation by adults.

Child's faeces rinsed into drains can be washed into peoples' compounds, streams or rivers. When faeces are washed into people's compounds, children may be the most affected since they play a lot in compounds. Washed into rivers and streams, many people may be affected especially when they drink from these rivers and streams.

When thrown into garbage containers and disposed of with other solid waste, they become exposed to flies, rain and wind and may again end up in people's food. When buried, depending on the depth, free-range farm animals like chicken and pigs can dig them out, while run-off water can also wash them into drains or streams.

This high risk practice is common in both urban and rural areas of Ghana. According to the MICS 2006 report, about 53% of nursing parents in urban areas practised safe disposal of child's faeces. This implies that nearly half of urban dwellers practised unsafe disposal of child's faeces as at 2006. This situation was even worse in the rural areas, where more than 61% of the people practised unsafe disposal of child's faeces. The chart below provides a graphical presentation of the situation in all the regions:



Though there is need for intensive public education on safe Child's faeces disposal in all the regions, more education is needed in the three northern regions since those who practice safe disposal of child's faeces in these regions are too few. In the Northern Region, only 14% apply safe methods of disposing child's faeces and this figure is much better compared with 4.4% in the Upper East and 2.2% in the Upper West Regions.

According to the report, many respondents said they used "other" methods of disposal and upon further investigation, majority of observations reflect disposal in rivers and lakes. This gives an indication that there is the tendency of communities along rivers or lakes to wash their child's faeces into the water bodies which are often used by populations down stream for various purposes including drinking.

In the Volta Region alone, about 35% of respondents are likely to be in this bracket, followed by about 17% in the Upper West and 7% in the Upper East Regions. It is worthy of note that all these three regions have a number of communities located along the Volta River, a major source of drinking water for many rural and urban communities in Ghana, a situation that may have major consequences on human health in these areas.

Source: Water and Sanitation Sector Monitoring Platform (WSMP) Ghana, October 2008