

World Water Day, 2016; Better Water, Better Jobs for the Unorganized Sector

Dear Editor,

World Water Day is observed each year on March 22, by the United Nations (UN) as recommended by the UN Conference on Environment and Development, 1992. The theme for the year 2016 was 'Better water, better jobs' to highlight the importance of quantity and quality of water in all jobs.

As a part of the curriculum for the undergraduate students, the Department of Community Medicine, Yenepoya Medical College, Mangalore, conducted a program that focused on the water issues for workers at construction sites.^[1] This was to sensitize the students toward the health in the unorganized sector. A "role play" by the students was followed by a demonstration of inexpensive and sustainable methods of water treatment before consuming as well as hand-washing practices. The program concluded with an interactive session with the workers and contractors and an informal observation of workplace facilities.

This letter describes briefly a perspective on safe drinking water issues in the unorganized sector and draws the attention of experts in the field of occupational and public health toward Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) related issues in the unorganized sector. This sector includes 90% of the workforce and about 50% of the national product in India.^[2] Apart from construction site workers, they include railway coolies, street vendors, beedi (hand-rolled locally made cigarettes) workers, domestic helpers, daily wagers, and auto drivers. These are the jobs that lead to significant dehydration due strenuous working hours and heat exposure. Most workers are in situations that lead to nonavailability of safe and potable drinking water and hand-washing facilities. They have long waiting hours to get hired and get paid at the end of the working day, but if not hired, they have to go without any wages. The WASH-related facilities are compromised at work and home for most of them. The women in this sector may be pregnant or have under-five children accompanying them at the workplaces. Exposure to unsafe drinking water and lack of sanitation measures poses a danger not only to pregnancy outcomes but also to morbidities and mortalities among their children.

The National Commission on Labor has observed that there are serious irregularities in the unorganized sector where the workers are unaware of their rights and law is unable to regulate it.^[3] Addressing WASH issues is a single most cost-effective measure to have a healthy workforce of

India and similar countries. This may be attained through the development of appropriate Information, Education and Communication programs alongside the regulations to ensure this basic need for each one in the society.

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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