

## Original Article

### Assessment of Environmental sanitation: Co-ordination among service providers at district level in Kolar

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## Abstract

**Background:** Public health functions are divided between several Government agencies including health and engineering departments, Panchayat raj, etc. Intersectoral co-ordination among them is required for maintaining environmental sanitation. **Aims:** To understand the perception of service providers on agencies primarily responsible to provide environmental sanitation and the intersectoral co-ordination among them. **Methods and Material:** Sixty six functionaries from health, engineering, Panchayat raj and other agencies involved in environment sanitation services in Kolar were studied to understand their perception on this function. Their perception on provision of services related to water and waste management, vector control and overseeing of sanitation in hotels, slaughter houses and cattle keeping and co-ordination among various departments was assessed. **Results:** Personnel from all the sectors totally agreed of panchayat/municipality being primarily responsible to provide water and manage wastes. There was disagreement regarding the primary service providers for vector control and overseeing of hotels, slaughterhouses and cattle keeping. Majority in the health sector felt panchayat/municipality is principally responsible for vector control whereas personnel from other sectors perceived health departments were principally responsible. Majority perceived both health and panchayat/municipality departments are responsible in ensuring safe water and sanitation in epidemics. **Conclusions:** Intersectoral co-ordination among the departments was found to be better during emergencies and not on routine basis. There is a need to orient the service providers of the public health function of environmental sanitation on the primary service provided and their role in intersectoral coordination.

**Keywords:** Environmental sanitation, intersectoral co-ordination, public health functionaries.

## Introduction

The public health functions of environmental sanitation which includes water supply, sewerage management, waste management, vector control and sanitation of public places are divided between several government agencies which includes the health department, Panchayat raj, public health engineering and others. Intersectoral co-ordination between these agencies is necessary for maintenance of environmental sanitation. The responsibility for provision of environmental sanitation service has been transferred from the district governments and various boards to the Panchayat raj institutions (PRIs) at the block and village level. However, drinking water supply and sanitation services in the country continues to be inadequate, despite long standing efforts by the government to improve its coverage.

The rural sanitation covers only 21% of the population.<sup>1,2</sup> Though the investment in sanitation and water has increased, it is low by international standards. Water supply and sanitation is a state responsibility. Generally the states plan, design and execute these services through the various state departments, engineering departments and boards. The responsibility of operating the sanitation and water supply services is given to the PRIs in rural areas and to the municipalities in the urban areas from the year 2003.<sup>3</sup> Because of the transfer of the sanitation and water supply services from various government departments to the PRIs there is bound to be confusion during the transition period as to who is responsible primarily to provide the services which may lead to poor quality service provision.<sup>4</sup> Hence the study was conducted to know the perceptions of the

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providers of environmental sanitation and water supply as to which departments are principally involved in providing these services. The intersectoral co-ordination among the different agencies providing water and sanitation services in Kolar district of Karnataka was also assessed.

## Materials and Methods

Sixty six personnel from the health department, engineering department, Panchayat raj institutions (PRIs), non government organizations (NGOs) and village based during the months of December 2013 to March 2014. Community organizations were selected and studied in this cross sectional study. Their perception on the departments involved in providing the services namely potable drinking water, sewerage and drainage, solid waste management, vector control and oversight of hotels, slaughter houses and cattle keeping practices were studied through a structured and pretested questionnaire. The responses from the self administered questionnaire was coded and entered into microsoft excel sheet. The responses were summarized as proportions. Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Institutional ethics committee.

## Results

Perception of personnel from health department and from departments/agencies other than health about departments with primary responsibility for providing environmental sanitation service is shown in the table 1.

Services	Departments with primary responsibility for the services							
	PRI/CMC n (%)		Health n (%)		Engineering/ PWD n (%)		Others n (%)	
Drinking water	46 (69.7)	18 (27.3)	0	0	0	2 (3.0)	0	0
Severage	46 (69.7)	18 (27.3)	0	0	0	2 (3.0)	0	0
Drainage	46 (69.7)	18 (27.3)	0	0	0	2 (3.0)	0	0
Solid waste disposal	46 (69.7)	18 (27.3)	0	2 (3.0)	0	0	0	0
Vector control	30 (45.4)	8 (12.2)	16 (24.2)	12 (18.2)	0	0	0	0
Oversight of Hotel	16 (24.2)	4 (6.1)	12 (18.2)	12 (18.2)	6 (9.0)	0	12 (18.2)	4 (6.1)
Oversight of slaughter houses	12 (18.2)	6 (9.0)	12 (18.2)	6 (9.0)	4 (6.1)	0	18 (27.3)	8 (12.2)
Cattle keeping Practices	8 (12.2)	4 (6.0)	8 (12.2)	0	0	0	30 (45.4)	16 (24.2)

Table 1: Perception of personnel about department primary responsible for providing environmental sanitation.

Perception of the participants about co-ordination among various departments and agencies in environmental sanitation service provision is shown in the table 2.

Environmental sanitation services	Perception of intersectoral co-ordination	
	On routine basis n (%)	During epidemics n (%)
Sanitation services	42 (64)	50 (75)
Vector Control	38 (57)	46 (70)
Oversight of hotels	28 (42)	42 (64)
Cattle keeping practices	40 (60)	46 (70)

Table 2: Perception of personnel about Co-ordination in environmental sanitation.

## Discussion

The findings from the study clearly indicate poor clarity of job responsibilities among the service providers of environmental sanitation. It appears from the data that the transfer of responsibilities for provision of environmental sanitation services from the state and district government departments and various boards to the Panchayat raj institutions (PRIs) at the block and village level has not been successful.

The absence of clear understanding of the functions of their own departments by the participants is likely to cause inconvenience to the public as their service provision is likely to be of poor quality and incomplete. It has been observed that the implementation of decentralization of service provision related to water supply and sanitation has met with limited success because of low priority given to it by the state governments.<sup>4</sup> To achieve good environmental sanitation which is an essential component of primary health care, intersectoral co-ordination is the most appropriate principle to be executed.<sup>5</sup> But this study observed that intersectoral co-ordination is likely to happen more often during emergencies such as epidemics rather than on routine basis. This clearly shows that there is poor functioning of various departments and agencies in the service delivery of environmental sanitation. The intersectoral co-ordination is important in activities of monitoring, surveillance, fund allocation, health education and reducing duplication of work.

## Conclusion

This study clearly shows that public health functions are poorly functioning in Kolar. There is a need to streamline the various departments and agencies involved in public health functions by clearly defining their tasks and functions. These departments and agencies should co-ordinate environmental sanitation activities and also involve the community in the process. There is an urgent need to improve the health status of the society through effective and efficient public health functionaries.

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