

# Feeling the Water Pinch

While the poor and lower-middle income families have to shell out at least 15% of their income for safe drinking water, the rich spend just about 1%, says an IIT-M study

## Express News Service

**Chennai:** The poor in Chennai spend as much as 15 per cent of their income just to access clean drinking water, says a study by two faculty members of the IIT-Madras. Over half of the surveyed families, cutting across classes, prefer water cans for drinking purpose, with over 99 per cent of them perceiving it to be safe. These are the findings of the study 'Coping strategies and coping costs for accessing safe water in Chennai' by R K Amit and Subash S, faculty members of the Department of Management Studies and Department of Humanities and Social Sciences of the IIT-M.

"Being a city known for water scarcity, there has traditionally been a demand-supply gap. Now, there is a peculiar scenario in Chennai where a majority of the families here, irrespective of income, prefer water cans to other sources," Subash says. The study has found that households here turn to five main types of coping strategies — collecting, pumping, treating, storing and purchasing. All of these cost money and man-hours. A majority of the surveyed population perceive water quality is poor from all other sources — pipe water, public tap, Sintex tank, borewell, public well or tanker — except canned water. This forces the average family to treat the water using boiling, manual filtration and



Residents of Kilpauk queuing up near a Metro Water lorry to get their share of drinking water | EXPRESS

RO/UV treatment, which adds to the cost. Due to this, as much as 56.50 per cent of households depend on canned water for drinking water. But this comes at a price. Buying an average 12 cans in a month at approximately ₹30 per can is a substantial amount of money for the poor and lower-middle class.

The study confirms that poor households — those with a monthly income of less than ₹10,000 — spend a portion of their income on

safe water compared to the rich households. The cost for higher-income families is about one per cent of the income, while it is as high as 15 per cent for the poor ones.

According to Chennai Metro Water Board, the perception about poor quality of water is wrong. "There have been some grey areas like the concern about water getting polluted. We are addressing the issue and have asked Tamil Nadu Water Investment Company Lim-

ited to conduct a survey in this regard," says Chennai Metro Water officials.

Explaining the measures undertaken, the board says that the water they supply undergo a series of processes. Surface water is first chlorinated before alum is added to lessen the turbidity. Then rapid sand filtration method removes the solid waste. Pulsar technology is used to treat the water at the 530-MLD plant in Chembarambakkam.