

Nutritional and health status of rural farm women in Tehri Garhwal district of Uttarakhand state

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Rural farm woman who is involved in extensive work on fields for about 12 hrs daily is exposed to all the risks of ill health, poor nutrition, inadequate care and non-existence rights. As the head of the household she is expected to procure treatment for her children and herself without adequate resources or control. In a study conducted on 250 rural farm families it was observed that 51% of women were found to be suffering from anaemia and among these 6.3% had severe anaemia. About half of the women suffered one or the other symptom indicative of reproductive tract infection or pathology. Majority did not get additional food during pregnancy. It was found that inadequate and improper nutrition does not commensurate with her workload and physiological needs during pregnancy and lactation. The main reasons for poor health status were illiteracy, poverty, improper health and hygiene, lack of time, overburdened with work, lack of facilities, considered as downtrodden by the society and not given due empowerment. World has woken up to the ecological linkages between the mountain and low-lying areas. But what often goes unrecognized is the fact that it is the woman who is the de facto natural resources manager in the hills- more than men.

Key words : Health, Nutrition, Rural women.

INTRODUCTION

SINCE woman in the hill area is seen working so much and so often, her work is taken for granted. Like ambient air, she pervades all aspects of hill life and hence, rarely talked or thought about; But the problem and issues of health and nutrition in the hills have typically a feminine face. According to WHO health is defined as a state of complete mental, physical, social and spiritual well being free from any infirmity or disease. Nutritional status is the maintenance of health with well balanced diet and proportionate work. World has woken up to the broader ecological linkages between the mountains and the low lying areas: But what often goes unrecognized is the fact that it is the woman who is the de facto natural resource manager in the hills more than the man. As is true in many Asian countries, Being a woman itself exposes her to all risks of ill health, poor nutrition, inadequate care and non-existence rights. The decline of forest, agricultural and water resources, intensification of work burdens, limited access to decent health care and social contexts are some of the pressures that highland communities especially the women have to face. The health status of girls are more affected by generally deteriorating conditions.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A total sample of 250 rural farm families from Tehri district were taken to know the nutritional and health status of the women. The sample were chosen at random. The families who had their own land, their own livestock and were extensively involved in farming, livestock and household activities were chosen as the sample. Interview schedule through questionnaire was taken, besides using PRA technique for attaining the exact information on their nutritional standards. Observation and medical tests were done to get information on their health status and to know their drudgery problems.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From the previous studies it has been concluded that in Himalayan region in one hectares of land one pair of bullock works for 1064 hrs, male works for 1212 hrs and a female works for 3485 hrs. Women's role in agricultural operations is very significant in the

hill economy. These women participate in almost all agricultural operations, viz land preparation, manuring, sowing, transplanting, weeding, hoeing, applying fertilizers, taking care of crops from wild animals, harvesting, storage of food grains and so on. The success or failure of agricultural production depends largely on contribution made by womenfolk and as far as human labour is concerned since the participation of menfolk in agriculture is confined mainly to ploughing of land, irrigation and harvesting. Social and cultural aspects also govern the extent of participation of women at the farm.

PROFILE OF THE UTTARANCHAL WOMEN

Description	Total	Percentage
Population	4163161	49.10
Females per thousand males	964	-
Literacy	-	60.26
Working women	-	27.08
Participation of working women	-	35.98
Unemployed women	-	17.35
Women suffering from anaemia	-	45.60
Females giving birth after 2 years of first delivery	-	24.70
Maximum literate district in Uttarakhand state (Dehradun)	-	71.22
District with very low literacy rate (Uttarkashi)	-	47.48
Undernourished females	-	32.00

The women of hill region have to undergo a very hard life due to geo-physical conditions of the region. This work in the absence of proper nutrition and health care is bound to create serious health repercussions for the mother and child and infant it does. The outdoor activities are highly time consuming and about 10.25hrs out of a total daily routine work of 16.49 hrs is absorbed towards its performance.

The conditions of the rural women are very alarming. Most of the women (92%) are overburdened with work. They don't have sufficient time to look after themselves. Approximately 88 percent reported that due to lack of skills and technical know