

## Food habits of pre-school children in rural Varanasi

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### ABSTRACT

The study was conducted on food habits, nature and type of food intake along with frequency of special food taken by the preschool children residing in rural areas of Varanasi. Three hundred preschool children were purposely selected from Chalapur community development block of the district. The information were gathered with the help of "Questionnaire cum Interview Technique". Interview questionnaire contained comprehensive questions related to the study. The data were pre-tested in tabular form with suitable statistical tests. Though more than half of the overall children (51.33%) were non-vegetarian, but only 8.33% children used to consume this diet regularly. Nearly three fifth female children consumed vegetarian diet. The food habit was found significantly associated with sex of the child ( $P < 0.025$ ) and land holding ( $P < 0.05$ ) by the head of family. Sweet dish was preferred by male children while females liked sour and spicy diets ( $P < 0.001$ ). Although similar food items were provided to the male and female children ( $P > 0.05$  NS), but the provision of special diets to the male children by the mother indicated their biased behaviour towards male children and deprivation of the female children ( $P < 0.025$ ).

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Nutrition is a basic facet of health. It is necessary for physical, mental and emotional growth and development of the child (Park, 1998). Accelerated growth occurs during preschool age of the child. The child learns discipline and socialization during this period. In addition, there is significant increase in basal metabolism of the child due to walking, running and playing. These activities are responsible to have positive impact on food intake as well food habit of the child. Further, a lot of energy of the child is exhausted in adjustment with parents and family members. Consequently it is essential to develop good feeding habit and intake of nutritional food items in the preschool children (Verma and Pandey, 2002; and Singh, 2005). Considering all these aspects, the present study was fabricated to explore food habit, nature and type of food intake along with frequency of special food taken by the preschool children residing in rural areas of Varanasi district (Uttar Pradesh).

### METHODOLOGY

Three hundred preschool children were purposely selected from the villages of Chalapur community development block of Varanasi district (U.P.) Only one child was selected from a family. The information was gathered with the help of questionnaire-cum-interview technique. Various questions related to aims and objectives of the study were included in the interview schedule (questionnaire). The mother of the children were interviewed for this purpose. The data were presented in tabular form and the results were inferred with suitable

statistical tests wherever felt necessary.

### Background information:

Majority of the subjects belonged to Hindu (88.33%) religion and the contribution of Muslim subjects was only 11.67%. Amongst Hindu subjects, more than one third children (35.33%) were related to other backward castes, followed by general (27.67%) and SC (25.33%) Majority of the subjects lived in nuclear families (63.00%). The mean family size was assessed  $6.25 \pm 2.48$  members. The literacy rate of the mothers was found 69.33% and less than one fifth families (18.33%) had education beyond graduate standard. More than half of the mothers (56.67%) were house wives; followed by labour (27.67%) and business (11.67%). In addition, 2.67% and 1.33% mothers were engaged in service and agricultural activities, respectively.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table I illustrates food habit of the preschool children according to their sex. It was observed that nearly half of the overall children (48.67%) were vegetarian; followed by irregular (43.00%) and regular (8.33%) non-vegetarian. According to sex, more than half of the female children (57.34%) against 40.76% males were exclusively vegetarian. On the other hand, nearly half of the male children (50.96%) against 34.27% females were non-vegetarian (irregular). The statistical analysis suggested significant association of food habit with sex of the children ( $\chi^2 = 9.075$ ,  $p < 0.025^{**}$ ). Generally mothers preferred