

Prevalence of under-nutrition among primary school children

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■ **ABSTRACT :** Under-nutrition is a wide spread problem in developing countries and it reflects lack of knowledge and awareness on the part of the parents. Inadequate nutrition among children leads to improper development of their body and mind resulting into lower level of efficiencies. To know the prevalence of under-nutrition among primary school children, a sample of 270 children from Chamoli district of Uttarakhand state were selected. Three commonly used under nutrition indicators, *i.e.*, underweight, stunting and wasting were used to evaluate the nutritional status of the subjects. For this, the weight and height measurements were converted into weight-for-age, height-for-age and weight-for-height percentage of standard for each child using NCHS standards. The children were grouped into different grades of nutritional status by both Gomez's and Waterlow's classifications. The study revealed that weight and mid upper arm circumferences (MUAC) of both boys and girls were comparatively below the reference standards of both ICMR and NCHS. Height of boys and girls in all categories of age were almost equal to the reference standards of ICMR and NCHS. Regarding the prevalence of stunting, children in all age groups were found to be normal. Only 12.23 per cent children were mildly stunted in the category of 8 years. Regarding the prevalence of wasting, 65.18 per cent children were found to be normal, 22.59 per cent were in mild category of wasting and 12.22 per cent children were in moderate category of wasting. 62.96 per cent children were found to be mildly underweight.

■ **KEY WORDS :** Under-nutrition, Stunting, Prevalence

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The problem of malnutrition is multidimensional and inter-generational in nature, the determinants of which include household food insecurity, illiteracy and lack of awareness especially in women, access to health services, availability of safe drinking water, sanitation and environmental conditions and purchasing power etc. Besides early age at marriage of girls, teenage pregnancies resulting in low birth weight of the newborns, poor breast feeding practices, and poor complementary feeding practices, ignorance about nutritional needs of infants and young children and repeated infections further aggravate the malnutrition amongst children.

Many of our school going children consume inadequate diet and so they are malnourished. Malnutrition can be due to poverty. Parents may not be able to provide nutritious food to their children. Sometimes ignorance on the part of parents to

know the requirements of children, quantitatively or qualitatively may lead to malnutrition of children. When the child is in a hurry to go to school, he may skip breakfast or may not carry proper lunch to school or may become too tired after school activities and sleep off without taking night meals. Emotional disturbances at school due to poor academic performance or problems with siblings at home may reflect on the consumption of food (Srilakshmi).

Good nutrition is essential in childhood for optimum growth and performance in school. Under nutrition retards physical and mental growth which in turn, lower the efficiency in education and work. The foundation for good health and sound mind are laid during the pre-school age. Nutrition is one of the most important factors responsible for proper growth in infancy and childhood (Easwaran *et al.*, 1970).

Easwaran and Devdas (1984) reported that children with