

Food and nutrition security: An assessment of pre-school children

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Food and nutrition security is broadly characterized by three pillars: Availability, accessibility and absorption. Millions of children suffer from food and nutrition insecurity resulting in chronic undernutrition. The social composition along with the inability to buy foods also plays a role in food insecurity. Nutrition security implies physical, economic and social access to balanced diet, clean drinking water, safe environment and health care for every individual. Several programmes, missions and acts including a National Nutrition Policy (1993), National Nutrition Plan of Action (1995), National Nutrition Mission, have been formulated. Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) is one of the most important schemes for the improvement of nutritional status of preschool children. But they have not achieved nutritional goals. The present study was aimed to assess the adequacy of diet and nutrition and its impact on the nutritional status of pre-school children of rural AWCs of Bhagalpur and Banka Districts of Bihar. For this purpose 200 pre-school children were randomly selected from AWCs to assess the diet intake and adequacy by 24 hours recall method, and calorie and micronutrient were calculated and compared to RDA. For the nutritional assessment, anthropometry tools and WHO growth standards (2006) were used. Out of 200 children only 16 per cent of the children were getting full diet, while 84 per cent were not getting full diet, of which 20 per cent children were getting ½ diet compared to RDA, protein intake was only 16 per cent compared to daily requirement. Minerals and vitamins intake including calcium, iron, iodine, zinc, and vitamin A were less than 25 per cent compared to daily requirement. Environment and sanitation was poor in common. No single child was getting pure drinking water. Due to low intake of food and nutritional diet resulting 52 per cent children undernourished in which 22 per cent severely undernourished, and 48 per cent were normal. It may be concluded that food and nutrition insecurity leads to undernutrition in children. Food and nutrition security must be ensured through the ICDS and other National Nutritional Programmes for combating malnutrition in India.

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INTRODUCTION

Food is as essential for living as air is for breathing. But food security means something more than getting two square meals. Food and nutrition security is broadly characterized by three pillars: Availability, accessibility and absorption (Nutritional Outcomes). Availability of food, which is function of production and where absolutely essential may be imported. Access to food which is a function of purchasing power and

employment. Absorption of food in the body which is a function of clean drinking water, safe environment and health care (preventive and curative) for every individual. Food and nutrition insecurity results in chronic undernutrition. Apart from human suffering malnutrition is one of the major causes of morbidity, mortality, loss of national productivity and medical expenses. Undernutrition contributes 60 per cent of deaths due to infectious disease like malaria, measles, diarrhoea, pneumonia and perinatal disorders in preschool children. After over 60 years of independence the resistant problems of undernutrition persist though some of the severe clinical forms have declined and magnitude. According to last survey of NFHS (2005-2006), the prevalence of low birth weight (LBW) is nearly 30 per cent, about 55 per cent of preschool children are underweight (Weight for age), and 50 per cent stunted (Weight for height). Micronutrient deficiencies mainly iron deficiency

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