

Nutritional Status of Saharia – A Primitive Tribe of Rajasthan

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ABSTRACT The Saharia is reported to be one of the most backward tribes of Rajasthan. Recently media reported incidents of starvation deaths among Saharia tribal community in Kishanganj block of Baran district. Therefore, a rapid survey was carried out to assess the diet and nutritional status of Saharia tribal population. Eight villages, 4 each from Kishanganj and Shahbad blocks, where Saharia tribal population is concentrated were selected in consultation with the district officials. The study revealed that a majority of the households surveyed were nuclear families. About 81% of the male head of the households and 96% of their female counterparts were illiterate. The major occupation of the head of the household was either agricultural labour or other labour (82%). Only about 42% of the HHs surveyed possessed varying extent of land. In general at household level, the consumption of all the foods except cereals and millets were below the suggested levels. The intake of protein, calcium, iron, thiamin and niacin were comparable to the recommended allowances, while the intake of other nutrients such as total fat, energy, vitamin A, riboflavin, vitamin C and free folic acid were below the recommended levels. On clinical examination, the prevalence of Bitot spots among preschool children was found to be higher (8.3%) indicating that vitamin A deficiency is a major public health problem in the tribal population. The prevalence of undernutrition (weight for age <Median –2SD) among 1-5 years children were significantly higher (72%) than that reported for the State of Rajasthan (48%) (DWCD, 1998). Breast-feeding practices revealed that majority of the mothers initiated breast-feeding on the third day of the delivery. About 85% of the mothers discarded colostrum, mostly because of the traditional practice. The observations highlight the need for strengthening health and nutrition programmes in this area.