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'Indicators for malnutrition in kids worsening'

Raina Paul

BENGALURU: The indicators that represent undernutrition among children seem to be worsening, shows the National Family Health Survey-4. This, despite the schemes introduced by the government to tackle undernutrition.

The survey shows a worsening of certain indicators which mark undernutrition in children under the age of five. According to the data released in 2016, wasting (malnutrition caused due to food shortage in children) has increased to around 26% from around 17% in NFHS-3 released in 2006. The figure for severe wasting (acute malnutrition leading to chronic diseases) has increased to around 10%, whereas that of the previous survey was 5%. Other indicators such as underweight and stunting in children have only reduced by



around 2% and 7%, respectively, over the past 10 years.

"Cases of chronic malnutrition have increased. At any point, we get at least six to seven malnourished children in Bowring Hospital," said Dr C N Reddy, professor of paediatrics, Bangalore Medical College and Research Institute. He

said this occurs mostly due to lack of nutrients in the food or because the mother is malnourished.

"Malnourishment starts in the womb. If mothers are malnourished, they produce children who are malnourished," said Dr Somashekara H R, consultant in paediatric gastroenterology and hepatology, Narayana Health City. He said the government should invest in maternal health.

According to experts, only 60% of pregnant women attend ante-natal care services, intended to provide protein and folic acid supplements among other services to women who are carrying. The proportion of breastfeeding women who attend care services is only 57%.

Importance of breastfeeding

"Children get immunity from breast milk. Breastfeed-

ing should at least be 80% so that levels of malnutrition reduce," said Somashekara.

Doctors said most undernourished children are from the lower economic strata. They said many schemes exist, but these reaching the beneficiaries is doubtful. "Women are not even aware that schemes exist. The non-medical officials fail to make them understand the benefits. The women may avail the services for the first few days, but eventually stop," said Somashekara.

Among other schemes launched to tackle undernutrition are Janani Suraksha Yojana, which focuses on the health of poor pregnant women and integrated child development services, which seek to improve the nutritional and health status of children in the age-group of 0-6 years.

The model of Karnataka

Comprehensive Nutrition Mission is unique to the state and has been producing positive results in the two districts, Devadurga in Raichur district and Chincholi in Kalaburagi District since its inception in

"I don't think there is any scheme to address malnutrition in the country. That is why there is a need for a national programme to address malnutrition. All evaluations establish that infants below the age of three years are poorly covered. Such a model addresses the direct causes of malnutrition in a life cycle approach, addressing the needs of children, adolescent girls and expectant mothers," said Dr Veena S. Rao, Advisor, Karnataka Nutrition Mission.

She said the model should be replicated in other districts as it is unique and addresses the root cause of the problems.

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