

Study of Girls' Health, Particularly in Rural and Urban Contexts

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The health and nutrition-related issues of girls can be understood as a serious problem. Due to the patriarchal nature of Indian society and the moral inequalities prevalent within it, the health and nutrition problems of girls have become a critical issue. Despite the government's relentless efforts, the problem continues to persist. Currently, the health and nutrition issues of girls are more visible compared to those of boys and men. This is reflected in the higher male-to-female sex ratio, the higher mortality rate among women, and the shorter life expectancy for women. Although the average life expectancy for both men and women has increased, women's life expectancy has always been lower than that of men. There are several key factors responsible for the poor health and malnutrition of girls in society, including poverty, unemployment, Ignorance of health regulations, lack of medical facilities, inadequate nutrition in food, fashion trends, media influence, the desire to stay thin, and the prevalence of fast food, among others (I.C.S.S.R., 1975).

Girl's Health in Rural Areas:

The social structure of rural society is based on traditions and customs. Superstitions and social evils prevail there, and it is the girls who often become the victims of these beliefs and practices.

Girls face several kinds of restrictions imposed by their families and society. At a young age, they are assigned household responsibilities, such as cooking, tending to animals, working in the fields, and taking care of younger siblings. These responsibilities prevent them

from attending school and living their own lives. Childhood seems to vanish as they are burdened with adult duties. When a girl desires to go to school with her friends or play with her peers, she is instead weighed down by these chores. As a result, her health, both physical and mental, is adversely affected. Early marriages are also common, and instead of playing and studying, girls are pushed into household duties after marriage. In addition, the consequences of early motherhood negatively impact their health. Many girls become anemic, and in some cases, their lives are cut short. The continuous cycle of childbearing and caring for children from a young age further deteriorates their health, but society often fails to recognize this (Nagla, 2003).

In rural areas, girls' socialization takes place in such a way that they neglect their own health for the sake of the family, brothers, fathers, and sons (Ram, 2002).

Girl's Health in Urban Areas:

Although in urban areas, the health of girls is less affected by customs, traditions, and responsibilities, it is more influenced by fashion, media, and pollution. Girls living in urban areas desire to appear thin and slim. Television, Facebook, and other media play a major role in enhancing this desire. Influenced by film actresses, girls want to look slim like them. As a result, they start reducing their food intake to lose weight. In the age when they should be focusing on nourishing their bodies, they prefer dieting to become attractive. This leads to deficiencies in essential nutrients and anemia in their bodies.

Moreover, today's era is the era of globalization, where the trend of fast food is increasing, especially among the youth. In today's fast-paced lives, girls are incorporating more fast foods like pizza, burgers, noodles, and Maggie into their diets. At school canteens, girls can be seen ordering only these items, which have minimal nutritional value. These foods contribute to weight gain in girls and have a negative impact on their physical health. Traditional home-cooked meals like dal, rice, roti, and vegetables have been replaced by fast food, which is causing a steady decline in their health and increasing the risk of anemia, which is very harmful to them. However, today's society is not ready to acknowledge this issue. The current education system is also becoming a burden on the youth. Increasing competition is keeping them very busy. Parents' expectations from children are adding more pressure. At a young age, children are burdened with excessive study and tuition, which leaves them trapped in a cycle between school, home, and tuition. This has a detrimental effect on their health. In urban areas, the issue of girls' health is even more serious, particularly in slum areas where girls live in polluted conditions and work as domestic helpers in homes. In return, they do not receive nutritious food, which also affects their health.

While girls in rural areas are influenced by superstitions and social evils, in urban areas, factors like media, television, competition, and the growing trend of fast food lead girls to neglect their own health. It is essential to find solutions to the issue of girls' health. This requires changes in societal customs, values, and ideas. Daughters should be treated equally to sons. Awareness about girls' health should be spread within society. The government is making continuous efforts in both rural and urban areas. Under the Rural Health Mission, emphasis is being laid on girls' health, and awareness is being raised among women and girls in rural areas. The government has launched programs for women's education, communication, and information, such as the *Sakhi (Women) Program* under which female volunteers called *Sakhi* spread health education messages to other women in the village. Health education programs are being carried out as an integral part of daily

health distribution systems. Appropriate educational programs need to be organized for different groups in the community. Providing health-related education to the community should be a primary task of health workers and grassroots-level workers. Social organizations like Panchayats, Women's Committees, and Youth Clubs can contribute significantly at the community level, and NGOs can also play an important role in this.

Some potential solutions include:

- Changing societal mindsets.
- Strong opposition to child marriage.
- Raising awareness about health among girls.
- Changing cultural norms and practices.
- Encouraging nutritious food habits.
- Changing girls' perspectives on health and well-being.

In recent years, there has been a shift in family attitudes toward girls' health and nutrition. The state government is also making efforts to raise awareness about girls' health through various programs. These initiatives are bringing about a fundamental change in society and families' perspectives on girls' health. The state government has launched health awareness rallies to further raise awareness. A balanced diet is essential for maintaining good health, and proper nutrition is crucial for overall well-being.

Today, there is a noticeable change in society and families regarding the health of girls. This change is possible due to increased awareness about education and a shift in parents' perspectives. It is our duty as citizens to promote girls' education and ensure their health, as a healthy girl leads to a healthy state.

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