

Dietary Diversity Among Infants and Young Children in India: A Socio-Economic Perspective

Nikhil Sreenivas

ABSTRACT

Malnutrition is a condition that occurs when the body lacks daily minimum requirements of nutrients. It is measured in terms of the outcomes like stunting, wasting, and low BMI. India has been struggling with chronic malnutrition for decades. Dietary diversity is an important component that can solve the issue of undernutrition, especially among children as a diverse diet can provide a wide variety of high-quality nutrients that will help in the physical and mental development of children. The present study used an animal protein-adjusted dietary diversity to understand the role of various socioeconomic factors in determining nutritional status. The socioeconomic pattern of animal-based food consumption and fish consumption is analysed at the all-India level as well as at the regional level (Gujarat and Bengal) to gain a comprehensive perspective. The study analyses the linkages between socioeconomic and demographic factors on dietary diversity, especially the consumption of animal protein source foods and fish, and how it differs in Gujarat and West Bengal. Analysis based on NFHS-4 (2015-16) data suggests that adequate dietary diversity is generally lower in India, as only around 27 percent of children of age 12-23 months have an adequate dietary diversity, and only 17 percent have an animal protein adjusted dietary diversity. The study also indicates that adequate dietary diversity and animal protein-adjusted dietary diversity vary across socioeconomic factors and demographic variables like the place of residence and gender.

Keywords: *Adequate dietary diversity; animal protein; socioeconomic status; fish consumption; malnutrition*

JEL Codes: *I15, J13*