

SOCIO ECONOMIC AND NUTRITIONAL STATUS IN 'AGARIYAS': SALT CULTIVATORS' WORK AS CONTRACTUAL MANPOWER IN ORGANIZED SALT INDUSTRIES

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ABSTRACT

Background

*As dimensions of malnutrition have a complex association with social Status. Nutritional status of an individual also depicts of quality of life. Malnutrition among the low-wage workers causes a direct impact on economic growth and development as a healthy workforce to create a healthy nation with a strong economy. **Objectives:** To assess the social and nutritional status of salt cultivators (Agariyas) engaged in organized salt works. **Study Design:** Advance mixed method of study (both qualitative and quantitative). **Study Setting and Target Population:** Salt cultivator working as the contractual workforce in organized salt industries in Bhavnagar, Gujarat for more than one year in salt works. **Subjects/Methods:** Field research had an integrated approach where qualitative data comprises in-depth interview, observation, audio, and video recording and focus group discussion (FGDs). For the quantitative aspect of the study pre-tested standard modified questionnaire tested as per the local region setting having both structured and the semi-structured questionnaire. Socio-economic and demographic profile, Health Symptoms, Nutritional assessment (Height, weight, Mid Upper Arm Circumference-MUAC, Basal Metabolic Index-BMI and Waist and Hip Ratio-WHR) was recorded. Hemoglobin was analyzed using digital hemoglobin analyzer. Field Survey was conducted in semi-urban villages located near Bhavnagar city of Gujarat during the beginning phase of salt cultivation season. **Results:** Total 166 salt cultivators participated in the field survey and research, of which 102 were male and 64 were female. The research found the about 24.1% of salt workers are under-weight/ Chronic Energy Deficiency Category I & II. While small proportion (1.2%) of salt cultivators was severely underweight/ Chronic Energy Deficiency Category III. Mid-Upper Arm Circumference of the salt cultivators was 24 ± 3 cm. The mean hemoglobin of the salt cultivators in the present study was 10.7 ± 2.0 g/dl. In focus group discussion and in-depth interview, other information regarding their health hygiene and sanitation were recorded.*

Conclusions

Prevalence of under-nutrition and underweight high among the low wage salt cultivators. Both male and female salt workers have low mean hemoglobin level (lower than the standard level). Poor and monotonous diet, low income, poor housing, migration, lack of education, poor hygiene and sanitation make them more vulnerable. Integrated and comprehensive social security policy is obligatory for nutritional and social insurance for the salt cultivators and their families.

KEYWORDS: Salt Cultivator (Agariyas), Socio-Economic and Demography, Under-Weight, Chronic Energy Deficiency (CED), Under-Nutrition, Housing, Health Care Services, Low Hemoglobin