

Chapter 18

CHILD HEALTH STATUS AND INEQUALITIES IN THE INDIAN SUNDARBANS

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ABSTRACT

This paper tries to look at the status of child health in a climatically vulnerable area of Indian Sundarbans. Method: It is based on data collected by the FHS-IIHMR during April-May, 2012. The survey collected household data from 1,200 households having a child in 0-6 year age range. The survey followed two-stage stratified random PPS sampling. Child health status was calculated as percentage and inequalities calculated by simple cross-tabulations. Results: Child health is explored from the initiation of pregnancy to six-year age for antenatal care, institutional delivery and postnatal care, breastfeeding, food, full immunisation and malnutrition. Eighty-eight per cent of the mothers had three or more ante-natal care visits. After delivery, eighty one per cent of the children were checked by any health worker, but only fifty per cent of the mothers had any postnatal check-up. In the Sundarbans, almost all of the mothers (99 per cent) mentioned that they have given breast-milk at any time after delivery. Almost half of them (45 per cent) reported that they started breastfeeding immediately within half an hour of the delivery. Among the children aged less than three years, 78 per cent received supplementary nutrition programme food. Eighty seven per cent of the children were fully immunised. One-third of the mothers were malnourished. These indicators are also associated with other socioeconomic correlates. Discussion: Improvement in child health status needs to be prioritised in the health care system. Also, removal of inequalities in child health will pave the way for universal child health care.

Keywords: children, mothers, child health, maternal health, rural health, India

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