

Gender Differences in Nutritional Status

A cross-sectional study was undertaken among 130 under five children of an urban slum of Kolkata, to assess the prevalence of malnutrition, with gender difference and age trend. Infants below six months of age were excluded to eliminate the effect of breast feeding. Grading of nutritional status was done according to IAP classification(1).

Prevalence of malnutrition was 55.38 per cent (females 77.6%; males 31.7%; $P < 0.001$). Most of the cases of malnutrition were of Grades I and II, contrary to other authors(2,3); 7.67 per cent of girls and 15.0 per cent of boys were of Grade III malnutrition. Only two Grade IV cases were found in both the boys. More than half of the female infants were suffering from malnutrition, though all the male infants were of normal nutritional status, indicating lack of proper care of female children right from the first year of life. A significantly ($P < 0.05$) increasing trend of malnutrition was observed with increase of birth order in the girls, but no such trend was observed in boys. This probably indicates a lack of interest and affection in higher orders of birth in case of girls, leading to improper care and inadequate nutrition.

Malnutrition is a serious public health problem which, occurring in a girl child, has

grave aftermaths. Though Subrahmanyam, *et al.*(4) calculated the food intake of boys and girls, and found no bias against girls, it is a hard reality that in many parts of our country there is a definite negligence of the girl child.

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