

Food Security and Urban Poor : A case study of Varanasi

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Introduction

Whereas the total population of India has increased only 2.7 (census of India 2011) times in last 50 years, the total urban population of the country has increased more than 4.5 times (census of India 2011 a). Along with the urban development there is a rapid development of slum population too¹. According to a recent estimate of Tata Institute of Social Sciences, by 2017 India's total slum population will exceed 104 Million with Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh, AP and MP having the largest slum population in the country (Indiaonlinepages 2015) (UP as per the census of 2011 is home to 62 lakh slum dwelling population) (census of India 2011 b). India has the dubious distinction of housing the second biggest² slum of Asia (Dharavi) (International Business Times 2013).

In mega cities (i.e. Population having more than 10 million people)³ (census of India 2011c) of the country, slums have now become a permanent

1. As per UN Habitat a slum is characterized by lack of durable housing, insufficient living area, lack of access to clean water, adequate sanitation and insecure tenure (<http://www.unhabitat>). Under Section-3 of slum area improvement and clearance act 1956, of India, slums have been defined as mainly those residential areas where dwellings are in any respect unfit for human habitation by reasons of dilapidation, overcrowding, faulty arrangements and designs of such narrowness or faulty arrangement of streets lack of ventilation light sanitation or any combination of these factors which are detrimental to safety, health and morals. A compact area of at least 300 populations or about 60-70 households can be recognised as slum by the Charge officer as 'Identified slums' (Census of India 2011b).
2. Biggest slum in Asia is Orangi in Pakistan
3. Mega Cities: Among the Million plus Urban Areas /Cities, there are three very large UAs with more than 10 million persons in the country, known as Mega Cities. These are Greater Mumbai UA (18.4 million), Delhi UA (16.3 million) and Kolkata UA (14.1million).

feature. The reasons have been manifold. Climate change and the consequent floods or drought, land pressure, ethnic conflicts, land acquisitions or the sheer temptation for the prospects of better earning and living have pushed and pulled populations to move from their usual abode in distant lands to the peripheries of cities. Whereas these populations seemingly remain to be 'outsiders' and their presence is looked upon as defiling the face of the city, they provide invisible fuel for the urban engine to keep chugging.

The slums of India have been categorised⁴ under three divisions: Notified⁵, recognised⁶, and identified⁷. Amongst the three, the position of identified slums are worst in terms of employment, education, food, health, safety and legality as they have no legal status, thus entitlement of a slum according to the UN habitat report, slums have a majority of women who are taking the burden of affliction since long (UN-Habitat 2003). It is a form of cultural violence prevailing in the society that women should endure greater suffering to safeguard their families' wellbeing. Thus they easily become a subject matter of discrimination and injustice rampant in especially poorer population. In this respect food and nutrition are the major concerning areas related to women as undernourished and unhealthy female can't make her family mentally and physically fit to survive in the competing world.

Food security exists when people can obtain nutritionally sufficient and ethnically acceptable food in a manner that maintains human dignity (Beaumier and Ford 2010). The World Food Summit of 1996 defined food security as existing "when all people at all times have access to sufficient, safe, nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life" (World Health Organisation 2015).

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4. Three types of slums have been defined in Census 2011, namely, Notified, Recognized and Identified.
 5. All notified are a sin a town or city notified as 'Slum' by State, Union territories Administration or Local Government under any Act including a 'Slum Act' may be considered as Notified slums
 6. All areas recognised as 'Slum' by State, Union territories Administration or Local Government, Housing and Slum Boards, which may have not been formally notified as slum under any act may be considered as Recognized slums
 7. A compact area of at least 300 populations or about 60-70 households of poorly built congested tenements, in unhygienic environment usually within adequate infrastructure and lacking in proper sanitary and drinking water facilities. Such areas should be identified personally by the Charge Officer and also inspected by an officer nominated by Directorate of Census Operations. This fact must be duly recorded in the charge register. Such areas may be considered as Identified slums.

More recently in 2006 the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) developed a more nuanced definition of food security wherein it defined food security and food insecurity under various categories (USDA 2014).

Food insecurity prevails when people are not able to access or secure nutritionally sufficient food that is culturally desirable at the intervals when human body requires. For the present paper, framework of a community case study of Beumier and Ford (2010) has been taken and focused on the capacity and consumption of food of the slum population of particular localities within Varanasi municipal limits.

Much work has been done on the nutrition and health of women in the various slum areas of the country (Kumari 2011; Choudhary 2002; National Nutrition Monitoring Bureau 2003). Food insecurity per se, amongst women of slum areas has not been studied. This study focuses to fill this knowledge gap.

Methodology

The Universe of this research is the Nagwa, Rajghat and Bajardiha slums of Varanasi. Out of these two (Nagwa and Rajghat) are recognized slums and, one (Bajardiha) is an identified slum.

Nagwa slum population which is adjacent to the famous Assi ghat, a very popular tourist destination of Varanasi, made all the more popular by the Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi from where he started his Clean India Campaign. The Bajardiha slum dwellers, mostly Muslims, engaged in either weaving work or rag picking and the Rajghat slum population is of Mallahs (the boat people).

The Nagwa slum population is around 200. Houses are constructed by individual residents on a privately owned land. In its neighbourhood is a recently constructed Ravidas park, but also a big drain known Assi Nullah, the nearby area which is densely populated is surrounded by multi story buildings. The condition of slum becomes miserable in rainy season when the drain starts overflowing due to flood and heavy water flow. In Nagwa, it was found that the average income of the respondents per house hold is 182 per day, one third of this amount was spent on rental for the shanty that they lived in. 53.33% of the women of this locality were domestic servants being paid anywhere between rupees five hundred to twelve hundred per house, per month, 6.66% were small shop owners and 20% were housewives.

The Rajghat New Basti slum consists of around 450 people and is situated at the bank of river Ganga in between Khirkiya ghat and Rajghat. Often their houses are destroyed either by municipal authority or frequent floods. In Rajghat it was found that either the slum women did not have any fixed jobs, were labourers or small shop owners (27.7%). Their employment was basically seasonal and market driven. Some were maid servants (13.88%). The average daily income of the household was around Rs 204.41

Bajardiha slum consist of around 600 people. It is situated near Khojwa market. It has majority of Muslim population. A large population has migrated from Murshidabad and nearby areas of West Bengal due to flood and environmental causes. They are mostly Rag Pickers and are Bengali speaking. Others are born and brought up in Banaras or nearby areas and are weavers by profession. It was found that the Bengali Muslim women and other family members were all rag pickers (61.53%), women from weaver community were engaged in their family business of weaving (11.53%) and others were not working outside their homes (19.23%). The average daily family income was around Rs 205.19

Figure



Source: Google maps

Data Collection and analysis

A mixed method approach was adopted to identify the food consumption patterns of this population. In the semi structured interviews (n=92) and through focus group exchanges (n=3) and interviews with key informants like store managers, civil supplies officials, education volunteers, Ward councilors (n=5), grocery store keeper (n=4), conducted over three seasons (May, June , October, November, 2016 January and February 2017). The study deciphered food insecurity prevalent in this community.

The research team consisted of four female and two male researchers, led by a tri lingual researcher (not necessitating a translator). Informed consent was obtained by all the respondents and attempts were made to adhere to all the hitherto prevalent ethical norms.

An interview and focus group guide identifying key themes (Table 4) was used to allow for flexibility in questioning while maintaining some structure. Focus groups were conducted to expand on data collected during interviews and to validate preliminary findings, with participants selected from interviewees. Confidentiality was preserved when demanded by the participant. Rigor was established using member checking, respondent quotes and triangulation of informants and methods.

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Results

Experience of food insecurity among slum women in Varanasi

Participants in this study described experiencing food insecurity on a regular basis. More than half expressed being anxious about running out of food in previous year. 38% noted not having eaten enough at least once in the previous year. 13.04% said that very often they skip meal whereas 57.60 % accepted that sometimes they skip and reduce meals to let other members of their family eat first. 50% of women reporting a decrease in the access and availability of ration from ration shops.

Determinants of slum women's food insecurity and external stress

Urbanization:

Only 27.1% respondents were indigenous rest 73% respondents had migrated to the city. The studies revealed a mix of push and pull factors that caused these communities to migrate to the urban areas of Varanasi. Climatic challenges, mostly floods caused 9.7 % of people to leave their usual abode (draught factor was absent, as most of the slum population migrated to Varanasi from the areas which were more prone to floods). Push factors such as poor livelihood (32.60%) worked strongly. Though land acquisition was not the main cause of movement, 11.47% cases of displacement were found. Similarly, in some cases the civil war of 1971 of erstwhile East Pakistan caused these Bengali speaking people to move from their usual place of abode. Pull factors such as better income and employment were other reasons for 40.21 % of the rural dwellers to get settled in Varanasi, as a general notion of Banaras prevailed that it is a place where all can find work as well as food prevailed. Similarly, 14.13 % were motivated by the presence of a family member or friend in the city. Marriage was also one reason for migration of 10 % women to move to the city.

All the respondents live under make shift temporary roofs, around the challenges of untreated waste and very unhygienic conditions. It is enough to find a place to 'hide their heads' as one respondent put it to be concerned about the surroundings.

Thus solid waste management has never been an issue and has not been attended so far. This has resulted in varied challenges like increase of untreated solid waste and a lack of concern for the same. The absence of virtually no

water policy has exposed these settlers to paying extra money towards running water that has almost everywhere been obtained by the land lord exploiting the ground water incessantly adding to the city's woes of water depletion (Upadhyaya 2013).

Hunger:

In this context it becomes important that nearly all the women interviewed, expressed severe dissatisfaction with the quantity and quality of food that they were able to consume or serve their families. Experiencing hunger and having no avenue to satisfy the same was an expression that was used frequently. Hundred percent of our respondents mentioned that they have gone hungry for days in the past. There has also been a trend to keep the children fed anyhow. Dashmi (45 years) said: "... They cannot go hungry. We are adults we understand....during rainy season there is less work, there are times that we still have to go hungry...there are also occasions that there is food only for the children, and we have to go hungry....When there is sufficient food only then all can eat. Children cannot go hungry. We can....When we came here we were told go to Banaras. There will be work as well as food. But here we had to work with no food" she says. Similarly Madhuchiranjivi Jha (35 years) says "Sometimes there is no food, sometimes I borrow money. If no food is left for me I never cook for myself. Only cook if it is less for my husband and children. Often I go to sleep hungry".

Inadequate quantity:

Though the respondents did not admit of eating less than their requirement, their statements regarding the amount of grocery they buy reveals that the food they eat is less than thirteen hundred calories per person. In an average family of around 5 people having 3-4 children per family, daily consumption of wheat and rice is approximately 1.5 kg in all: Dal around 100 gram, oil 50 gram and vegetables around Rs 30-40 per day which mainly includes potatoes, and sometimes small amount of seasonal vegetables. Almost all respondents agreed that they do not buy milk for feeding their children regularly. They purchase very little quantity of milk daily for making tea etc. Even fruits are seldom purchased. "It is better to buy daal and rice for my children than to buy fruits. This will at least satisfy their hunger" says Neha, 27 years. "We eat properly once in a day only. The second time meal is usually replaced by tea only or chapati with salt and chatni" says Sharada Devi (45 years).

The common refrain is that we can only buy what we can afford. Food habit also depends heavily on culture and society. In Bengali slum families, rice, potato and fish are their staple food. The majority of Bengali women quoted price rise as the main cause of making do with rice and potatoes and sometimes Dal. In a family of ten (husband wife, five boys and three girls) potatoes and rice is consumed. ‘We often buy half a kilo of potatoes that lasts us for two days’ says Jharna Haldhar (35 years). “Due to inflation, the food intake has been affected a lot. Previously the wages were low but the grocery was cheaper, now it is vice versa. Previously we used to take meal thrice daily but now it has been reduced to twice a day”, says Iliyaz Ansari, a local community leader of Bajardiha. The study revealed that 38.04 % women were adversely affected, 48.91 % were slightly affected and 8 % were not at all affected by inflation in terms of their food intake. The only coping mechanism was skipping their meal so that they could save for their family members. 13.04 % said that very often they skip meal whereas 57.60 % accepted that sometimes they skip meal.

Non vegetarian food is more appreciated in slums but due to shortage of money they can’t afford it daily or weekly. Even its quality and quantity is not up to mark. “We like to eat meat and fish but can’t afford it regularly” says Mala (29 years).

Quality of food:

Quality of food is often very poor, a fact to which all the respondents admit. We no longer eat meat or fish. We just survive on ‘ordinary food’.⁸ Each day we buy ration. Half a kilo of potato, rice about one and half kilo, thirty gram oil, turmeric for two rupees, salt for three’ Dashmi (45 years)’ .

‘My own income is not more than two and a half thousand. In this small money after the rental we can barely make two ends meet. My daughter who also lives in the neighborhood gives us some fish at times. Though I do not eat meat or fish but for my husband she brings it. Everything has become so expensive. There are also occasions that we sleep hungry” says Ganga (60 years). ‘Ofcourse we want to eat nice food. But at times there is no time to eat at times no money,’ says Alka Sarkar, (60 years).

8. Ordinary food is the common refrain. Ordinary food can be anything from Dal and rice, Potato and rice to salt and rice or salt and roti. Good food almost invariably is fish/meat. Yet Carbohydrates remain to constitute the bulk of the plate.

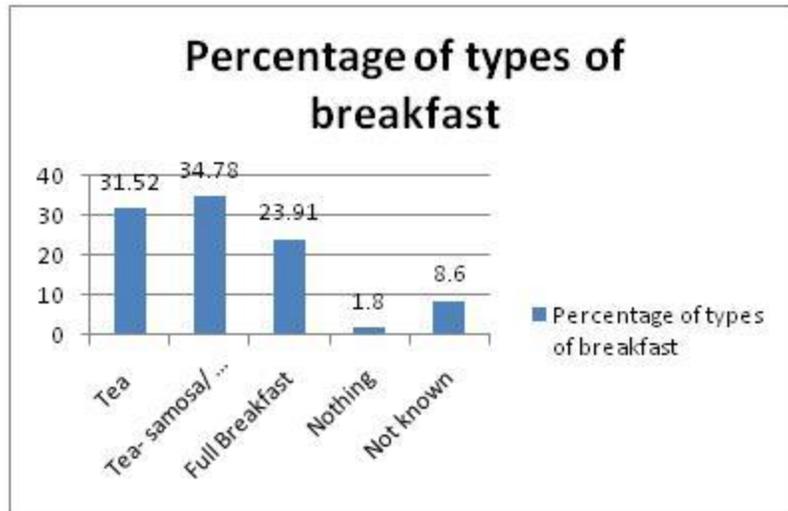
A combination of conventional thinking and limited resources is responsible for the deteriorating condition of women in slums exponentially. As per Hindu tradition a female member of the family has to serve food to other family members before having her own meal and in order to manage monthly budget, she has to sacrifice her meal quite often in a month.

Paro, 30 years says “due to limited food I have to skip meal 3-4 days a month in order to manage my budget”. “First I serve to my children then I eat” she adds. Similarly 39.13 % women eat at the end after serving all family members. Usually wife and husband eat meal together though wife is not allowed to eat before her husband. Even the younger generation women have been culturally trained to eat the last. First the children are served, then the men and women get to eat last. ‘I try to serve all before I eat. I can do with food or without food too...when I fall sick, the doctor writes me vitamin tablets that I eat’ says Anita, 35 years.

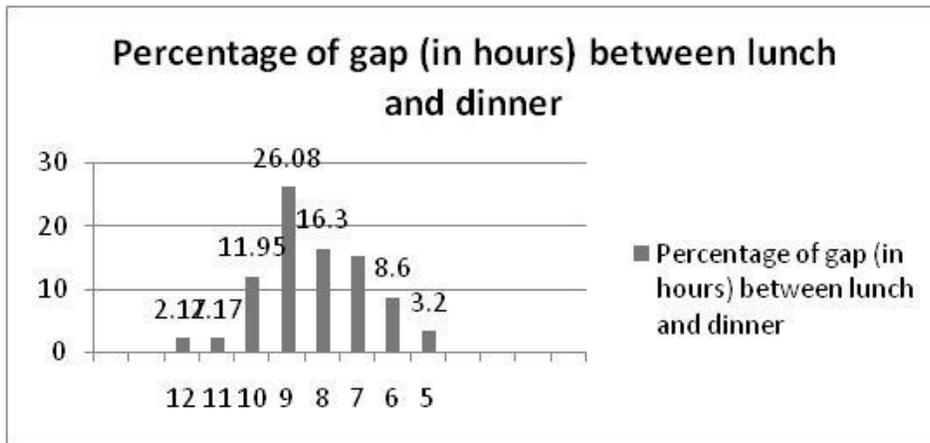
However during survey, in Muslim families this tradition was found absent. One of the Muslim male members from a weaver community explains, “We never force our wives to eat after us or with us. This is not in our religion. Usually we tell them and children to eat before we return home as our job has no fixed hours. It is much dependent on the availability of electricity. As long as electricity is there available in our workplace, we work. Sometimes we return home very late. So they eat before us.”

Another bad practice which was found to be superimposed on women specially mothers and wives in Hindu families was that women usually do not eat before taking bath yet other family members enjoy their breakfast at the same time. It is so much culturally inherited by them that it has become their routine now and they never find anything wrong in it. Skipping breakfast and large quantities of tea intake on empty stomach is a common practice among the slum women (31.53%).

Long hours of gap between morning tea and lunch, and also between lunch and dinner are very common practice especially as a coping mechanism to manage their food requirements.



The graph shows that tea only or tea samosa is a common breakfast in slums for women. These type of breakfast commonly responsible for high acidity, gas and indigestion among women in slums of Varanasi.



This graph shows that majority of women in the slum have an average gap of 9 hours between lunch and dinner which is a longer period, that causes acidity and other health problems among women in slums.

Majority of people had no money to buy food in bulks, not even from the government supply shops. It needs too much money to buy in bulk, so the purchases are done on a daily basis. "I purchase eatables daily. However, if there is no money we remain without food. Usually we eat the cheapest quality

of food grains” says Phulmati Devi, 40 years. For others the mass purchase of cereals and grains for 10-15 days on an average was quite common with a feeling that this could help them to survive better in the days of hardship. There have been significant price increases of late too. ‘Till very recently potatoes would cost us five rupees per kilo. It costs thirty now’ says Mamta, 45 years. Buying from the local grocery store for this small amount hardly leaves them the option of making a choice about quality. There were also evidences to show that the women would make their purchases after weighing the costs from comparing them between two or more stores. But it was price that was the decisive factor not the quality of the product that was ever in question.

Cost awareness and its comparison vary from community to community. In Muslim communities men buy the grocery items from local grocery shops as they are supposed to be sharper than women in calculations. Shiv Kumar Gupta the grocery shop keeper at Bajardiha says “although the slum people are uneducated they can calculate very well. Mostly male members or children purchase grocery. Female members come very seldom. Males are more intelligent. They compare the prices everywhere.”

Awareness of nutritional food

Though they can distinguish between ‘good food’ and ‘ordinary food’ we found their knowledge of nutritional value of food is limited to the visits they pay to a doctor when they fall sick. ‘I was trained as a nurse (she has studied upto class nine), but my husband never allowed me to go work as a nurse. I know it is good to eat greens. You get protein. I do not take much medicines’, says Annapurna Chakraborti, 60.

Most of the respondents considered good food as vegetables (42.39 %), rice (33.69 %), dall (36.95 %), fish (9.7%), meat (11.95%), roti (17.39%), milk (3.2%), chicken (7.6%), pudi (5.4%), kheer (2.17%). Most of the respondents considered rice, pulses and green vegetable as nutritional food. But others were either unaware or it was insignificant for them as their biggest issue was to survive rather than being healthy. “Whatever food we get is good for us. We can’t judge it as good or bad because we have no other choice available” says Guddan 30 years.

When the respondents were asked to tell what food items they prefer to eat but can’t afford due to shortage of money, 30.43% said that they liked but couldn’t buy fruits. Similarly for 27.17% Meat, for 25% milk, for 13.04 % of

respondent fish, for 8.69% chicken, for 9% green vegetables, for 3.2% pudu, for 5.4% paneer, for 4.34% egg and dry fruits for 3.2% cream were preferred food elements but they were helpless as they had to manage their resources very carefully.

Sharing:

In Bengali community despite living in the same neighbourhood for almost all their adult lives, and also belonging to more or less a similar ethnic origin, few (around 13.33%) respondents recalled having shared a meal or a food item in times of need. Our analysis is that the level of poverty is so acute that sharing and caring is no longer practiced. Moreover, there is also a sense of shame that constraints them from sharing or borrowing. However, in other neighborhoods sharing was more common in comparison to Nagwa. In Rajghat it was 28.20% and in Bajardiha 50% respondents practiced sharing. In general 14.16% of respondents said that they share or barrow food and money from neighbors and community. 11.9% said that they share food and money within their relatives or close friends and (57.60%) said that they never shared anything with anybody.

Solid waste:

“What will our solid waste be? What things do we buy that we will have refuse? What will we keep and what will we throw away? My son works as a labor. There are times he does not get any work. I work as a house maid for six hundred only. Even the fire is lit in my house irregularly. When there will be something to cook only then we will lit the fire” says Durga Sarkar (60 years) when asked about waste management. 97% of the respondents stated that they throw their trash on the road or in the main drain. They were never trained in recycling of solid waste and so there is no awareness of the same too.

Dignity:

Of all the people that we interviewed the woman who claimed she earned more than five hundred per day would beg on the Ghats and eat where the beggars would get food from some charitable foundation. But all will not take this road. ‘In the cities either the beggars can survive or the very rich. I cannot work against my dignity’ says Annapurna Chakroborti, 60, who would often go hungry as there is no support for her.’ ‘I was married off at the age of nine to a man who was 22 years my senior and also blind. I have suffered a lot in

life. May no human being suffer as I did”. Similarly Arti, 30 years says “I started begging at the age of 16. My family shifted to Rajghat around 15-16 years back due to land displacement by Government. Even after being married I and my in-laws have to beg in order to earn our livelihood as my husband is not well to do and even shares very less income with family. My husband works as a sweeper in roadways but usually does not give us as more... Life of a woman is not so easy. My husband does not give me money easily. He often beats me and spends his salary on drinking alcohol. Often I can't eat because of tension that how will I manage my household and feed my children” a narrative that is shared by many women.

Civil supplies support:

About 70% of the respondents had a ration card (yellow) where they are entitled to buy grain, fuel oil, sugar and rice at less than the market price. Daily pressure of work, non availability of enough spare cash and the unpredictability of the supplies all work against the convenience of not being in a position to avail of the facility. More than 30% of respondents were thus reluctant to buy food items from the government ration shop. Moreover, they also did not have the below poverty line cards (white or the AAY pink cards) where the price is low enough to become affordable. ‘We have a yellow ration card. Only the rich have poverty line, we have none. Those who have houses they have poverty line, not we. The ration card retailer gives us ration very irregularly. That also we sell in black at times’ says Charubala Biswas. According to the government survey twice last year in Rajghat, those who were found below poverty level were entitled to get rice and grains at cheaper rates though some people claimed that the survey was not done properly and many poor families were deprived of this facility.

In order to have a ration card one needs a proof of residence. ‘Having a valid proof of residence is invariably an essential requirement...what do we do of illegally settled people? On the one hand there is humanitarian concern on the other hand there are state regulations’, says Rakesh Tiwari, a onetime civil supplies inspector of Varanasi. ‘The infrastructure to implement food security bill is nonexistent. There are no government owned PDS shops, not enough godowns, power shortage and non-availability of internet facilities to monitor the working of the system. Even the department of civil supplies is running on its 21% sanctioned strength he adds. According to Babalu Pal the ward councilor of Rajghat, “People do not get ration from the government shop on

time. There are two reasons for this. Firstly the people do not reach on particular date and time to collect their monthly ration. Secondly the ration in-charge does not inform them properly about the date and time of the distribution. Though I have warned him not to do so however he explained that the ration provided by the government is for approximately 1000-1500 people but there are more than 2000 claimants.”

Drinking water

Drinking water is the major of concern in slums as slum dwellers do not have enough access to water sources. 83% respondents had problems with the drinking water facilities such as hand pump or supply water was unfit for drinking as it had many impurities and heavy metals. Still people were dependent on it as they had no other option resulting in many healths related problems. “Every day we fetch water from hand-pump which is around one km away. The water quality was also not up to mark. “We face immense problem in summer as there is no other source available nearby and water consumption is more in this season. If we go to station which is nearby for bringing water or taking bath the police harass and abuse us,” says Jhasi 26 years. “Often we wash our cloths and take bath at the bank of river Ganga for 60 years. This is the major source of water for us but now-a-days it is polluted by sewer water,” says Sheela Devi.

Violence

Often the slum atmosphere is clouded with direct violence. About 20% responded that they did not feel comfortable there but as there was no other place available or the rent was unaffordable they were compelled to live in slums. “We are poor people. Though we don’t like to live in slum yet we are living to save Rs 1000 or more as the rent,” says Mala 29 years. “Due to excessive violence at home I often quit food. My husband and father-in-law drink alcohol daily and create scenes. They also gamble and if I protest they start beating me,” says Arti 30 years. “My neighborhood is not a good place. Often there is theft and people including my husband are engaged in gambling and drinking. This atmosphere is responsible for my husband’s bad habits otherwise he would have been a good person”, adds Arti. Even though there is high violence in the slum society most of the women do not abstain from eating. Of all the respondents 74% do not abstain eating their food during violence. “We are earning for eating only. There is no enmity with food. We eat in any circumstance,” says Kalavati Devi 40 years.

Discussion:

The food insecurity of slum women of Varanasi is a result of cultural, socio-economic and political conditions. Their plight is multiplied by the fact that being women they are under pressure to be providers, where as their capacities of earning more substantially remains severely limited due to lack of any specialized training or in most cases, illiteracy. There is plenty evidence to show that the problem of drinking is prevalent amongst the male population of this area and so is the related challenge of indebtedness and violence against women. Inadequacies of earning capacities have led to 'new coping mechanisms' that have already had a damaging impact on women's health. Surviving the entire forenoons on simple cups of tea causes acute acidity but that is taken as their physical disposition. Compromising food intake has more adverse impact on health that has not been a part of this paper. However indications are that this affects their health adversely.

Given the vulnerability of these populations there has to be serious policy reconsideration. Ideally women want the government to setup some industry or some work skill that they can work from home. 'We do not like going from one house to another. It does not look decent. It is better if the government can make some arrangements that we can work from home with dignity' says Anita Biswas.

Making a legal residential proof a requirement to extend the below poverty line facility to these groups requires some serious rethinking. Similarly some kind of minimum wages in the domestic work has to be implemented. Moreover, either there has to be a provision for residence for these populations or at least some regulation on the rentals being charged by the land lords is required. Awareness programmes for not only the women but the entire households will also help in making the family realize the need of having more equitable food for women.

This has to be expanded from the current sole concentration on one macronutrient (carbohydrate) to the neglect of others (essential fats and protein) and to the complete neglect of all micronutrients. Policies then need to be put in place which will improve food supply, access and utilization across the spectrum of macro and micronutrients. Their intake of carbohydrates (good and bad) has been excessively high, and saturated fats and transfats too high (in proportion to their diet). Proteins are either very poor or in many cases nonexistent.

Rodents and field mice are the biggest problems in the slums. In the name of religion people refuse to kill them often. Thus health problems are inevitable in slums. “We never kill mice. Some times when they contaminate our food, we eat the same as we can’t afford to throw it. Whatever we have, we manage with the same,” said Basmani. Similarly approx 74% respondents agreed to the same fact.

Another interesting fact came out to be that due to ignorance, illiteracy and unawareness women are subjected to many myths and misperceptions easily. Some of the respondents had a perception that a food eaten by mice is not dangerous and poisonous in comparison to food eaten by Dogs and Cats. “We could eat food contaminated by mice but can never eat the food contaminated by Cat or Dog as it causes heart disease,” said Arjina, 28 years.

Conclusion

Urbanization and external socio-economic factors are causing difficulties for women living in these slums in obtaining sufficient food. Given the vulnerability of these slum populations there has to be a serious policy reconsideration. Coping strategies currently utilized to manage food insecurity such as skipping meals and reducing food intake on a regular basis are unhealthy practices that are to be addressed by the local urban council. There is currently a marked difference in the rural and urban resources for food for poor in the country. Thus there is a serious need of intervention by local, regional and central governments to invent, implement, coordinate and monitor strategies to enhance women’s food security and make future generations more equal by reducing the risk of their life expectancy.

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