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## RESEARCH NOTE

## Knowledge of Tribal Women regarding Nutrition Practices in Assam

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### ABSTRACT

*Healthy women are more superior to provide protection for themselves, children, and their families. Well-nourished mothers are more likely to have infants with healthy birth weights and are less sufferer from malnutrition. Balanced nutrition can also support our body in many ways. Proper nutrition improve our energy and mood, combat stress, or boost fertility. Nutrition is very much crucial at every phase of individual's life. Generally women are especially vulnerable to malnutrition because they grow faster than at any other point of life. In this regard, supplementation of nutrients is the prime requirement for them to fight against any disorder or disease. Hence, an attempt has been made to conduct a study on Knowledge of Tribal Women regarding Nutrition Practices in Assam. Kamrup District (M) of Assam was selected purposively for conducting this investigation. Total sample for the investigation was 120. Purposive Random sampling method was used to analyze the collected data. It has been observed from the findings that only a limited number of respondents had knowledge regarding nutrition and others were not aware about nutrition related knowledge. It is very clear from the findings that age, mass media and extension contacts has positively and significantly correlated with knowledge at 1 per cent level of significance.*

**Key words:** Knowledge; Tribal women; Nutrition; Practice.

Nutrition is the prime necessity to sustain our life in a healthy way. Nutrition always deals with food and the way food is absorbed, digested and assimilated to give proper nourishment in our body to protect from various diseases as well as infection. Nutrition provides a healthy environment either physically and mentally. Proper nutrition is essential to lead a balanced life in society. Because balanced diet provides diet full of all major nutrients such as carbohydrates, proteins, fats, vitamins and minerals. Assam is rich sources of local green leafy vegetables. But it has been observed that women are not consuming green leafy vegetables in adequate amounts. The adequacy of food depends on the food habits rather than availability of the foodstuff. Because, in Assam it may be mentioned that local green leafy vegetables are available everywhere, but it was lacking in the dietary of some communities. This may be either due to lack of awareness about goodness of green leafy vegetables or

food habits among the various tribes. The consumption of green leafy vegetables were lower in their dietary as compared with recommended level given by ICMR. *Nutrition plays a great role in our daily life.* Nutritional status is the situation of the body which can be determined by the intake of balanced diet and the capability to digest, and absorb properly by our body. Further, nutritional status can be determined by assessment of fat and lean body mass, biochemical assessment, clinical observation and so on. Moreover, the coolest and the simplest method of assessing nutritional status in a community is by measuring individual height and weight and calculating the Body Mass Index (BMI). It can be defined as the weight in kilograms divided by the square of the height in metres ( $\text{kg/m}^2$ ). Nutritional status can be categorized as undernutrition and overnutrition and together it is recognized as malnutrition. Nutrients are the materials found in various food items which drive biological activity and are essential for our body.

The goal of nutrition education is to reinforce specific nutrition-related practices or behavior to change habits that contribute to poor health. This can be done by creating a motivation for change among people. It is also very essential to provide new information about nutrition to change attitudes, skills and confidence among tribal women to improve their nutrition practices. A study conducted by *Melesse (2021)* and revealed that empowering women in household agricultural decisions and increasing their access to and control of economic resources are more promising for improving child nutrition. Overall, the findings suggest that efforts targeting to improve child nutrition in Ethiopia need to be complemented by efforts to improve women's nutrition knowledge and empowerment.

*Rachappa et.al (2020)* highlighted that majority of working women maintained normal BMI, 25 per cent of women were under weight and 18 per cent of women were overweight. Total 76 per cent of the respondents were under the high disease risk condition in waist hip ratio, 13 per cent were at elevated risk and 11 per cent was reduced risk condition. The nutrient intake of the respondents were calories (93%), protein (87%) and zinc (64%) was less than RDA but the intake of Fat (188%), and Calcium (125%) was more than RDA. Majority of the respondents had high knowledge about balance diet (70%) in addition to health status (59%).

A study conducted by *Suchitra and Kumar (2018)* on knowledge of rural women regarding nutrition practices in Bikaner district of Rajasthan, India, and revealed that majority of respondents were in the category of medium level knowledge level regarding nutrition practices. *Singh and Samal (2016)* in their study found that tribal women in selected villages were having low awareness in relation to health and nutrition aspect. They also revealed that majority of the respondents were having improvement habit in the fuel consumption pattern, balanced diet and conservation of nutrients.

A study carried out by *Devi and Sindhuja, (2015)* on ‘Nutritional status and knowledge, life style and dietary practices of tribal adult women’ highlighted that nutritional status and knowledge of the tribal adult women was unsatisfactory and they need in-depth nutrition education and intervention programmes for their holistic development. *Preeti et al (2019)* found that majority of the respondents had high knowledge but medium adoption level about health and nutritional practices. The correlation analysis revealed that independent variables, namely education, land holding,

annual income, social and cultural participation, extension participation and sources of information had positive and significant relationship with knowledge and adoption while age had positive and significant relationship with adoption about health and nutritional practices. The food or liquids affect our body and health because each food or liquid contain particular nutrition which is very necessary for our physical and mental growth. As we know that nutrition is essential for our body. So we should know that what food we have to take, how much and what type of nutrition contain a particular food. Food stuff has variety of benefits to human being.

*Some benefits of good nutrition are-*

*To maintain a good health:* Good nutrition is very essential to maintain high blood pressure, or hypertension, cancer, Heart attacks, heart failure, and strokes. A diet full of balanced diet such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat dairy will help lower our risk of various diseases.

*To improve well-being:* A balanced diet helps in maintaining good health and security. Because nutritionally foods will provide us liveliness.

*To sustain immune system:* A well balanced diet support us to maintain a healthy immune system and protect us from infections and disorders.

*To maintain energy levels:* Good nutrition is very essential to minimize physiological changes. White bread and sweets are two examples of refined carbs.

*To minimize effects of ageing:* Vitamins and minerals are healthy for the skin and can be found in foods like tomatoes, berries, avocados, almonds, and seafood.

As we know that food and water is necessary to build up our body and keep it healthy. Every good food and liquid contains some important nutrition like proteins, carbohydrate, fats, some vitamins, minerals and water. These all play different role to keep our body healthy and build new cells in our body. Hence, the present investigation is planned to have an insight of *Knowledge of Tribal Women regarding Nutrition Practices in Assam* with the following objectives-

- To identify the knowledge level of respondents regarding nutrition.
- To assess the knowledge level of respondents regarding different nutritional practices.
- To study the relationship between selected personal and knowledge level of the respondents in different aspects of nutrition practices.

**METHODOLOGY**

The study was conducted in the State of Assam. Kamrup district (M) of Assam was selected purposively for conducting this investigation. The universe of the study was the women population in the reproductive age group of 25 - 45 years. The total respondents for the study were 120 and samples were selected by using Purposive Random sampling method. The data on nutritional knowledge was collected only from primary sources. Interview schedule was used for eliciting information from the women regarding socio - economic background, food habits and nutritional status. Various types of tribal women such as rabha, khasi, bodo were selected from three development blocks. Accordingly, three villages such as Chaygaon, Rani and Boko were selected purposively based on concentration of tribal women. Data was collected on the basis of pre-determined objectives. Statements related to nutrition were framed to know the knowledge of tribal women. They were asked and accordingly responses were recorded. Forty respondents from each tribe were selected purposively to collect the relevant data. Personal interview method was used to collect data. Percentage, Mean score and t -test were used for statistical analysis of data. Some statements were framed on the basis of nutritional knowledge of tribal women and assessed in terms of three-point continuum such as aware, somewhat aware or not aware and scored as 3, 2 and 1 respectively.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The major outcomes of this study are analyzed as per the pre- determined objectives and presented under various sub-heads as given below:

Table 1 highlights nutritional knowledge of respondents in three levels. It is very encouraging to note that more than majority of respondents (60%) were aware about rich sources of vitamins. This findings also revealed that a large majority of

**Table 1. Percentage distribution of nutritional knowledge among respondents (N=120)**

Nutritional knowledge	Aware	Somewhat aware	Not aware
<i>Do you have any idea about</i>			
Importance of five food groups	50	60	10
Importance nutrients	30	30	60
Nutritional food	40	20	60
Rich sources of vitamins	60	40	20
Dietary supplements	10	10	100
Disease free life	40	20	60
Deficiency diseases/ disorders	20	60	40
Effect of improper nutrition	40	60	20
Deficiency symptoms	20	60	40

respondent's i.e.60 per cent were somewhat aware about five food group's nutritional foods, deficiency diseases/ disorders, effect of improper nutrition and deficiency symptoms. Further, a highest percentage of respondent's i.e.100 per cent were not aware about dietary supplementation.

Moreover, they had very poor knowledge regarding deficiency diseases/ disorders. So it is very necessary to organize nutritional programme to raise awareness among tribal women to lead a healthy and balance life. Otherwise, poor nutritional knowledge may create health related issues among them. As we know it well that all women have unique nutritional requirements. So, it is very essential to make them aware about healthy eating habit at every stage of life to manage their weight, boost their energy and feeling fresh.

Table 2 reveals that majority of respondents were from various category of knowledge level. Various aspects were identified and accordingly asked to each respondent. Based on scores, they were grouped as high, medium and low which clearly shows the knowledge level of respondents regarding nutrition. It has been observed that only a limited number of respondents had limited knowledge regarding nutrition, others were not aware about nutrition related knowledge.

**Table 2. Knowledge Level of the respondents' indifferent aspects of nutrition practices (N=120)**

Different aspects	Distribution of respondents			% mean score			Overall mean % score	Rank
	High	Medium	Low	High	Medium	Low		
	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)					
Importance of balance diet	24 (20.00)	27 (22.50)	69 (57.50)	78.11	57.07	37.12	56.12	I
Importance of nutrition	34 (28.33)	24 (20.00)	62 (51.66)	81.21	53.23	35.61	55.10	III
Importance of food groups	20 (16.67)	47 (39.16)	53 (44.16)	79.12	55.06	38.12	54.01	IV
Deficiency disorder	12 (10.00)	59 (49.16)	49 (40.83)	77.12	53.10	39.15	53.12	V
Importance of treatment				77.12	56.14	37.34	56.01	II

These findings also highlight that importance of balance diet, importance of treatment and importance of nutrition got rank 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> on the basis of mean score respectively. Aspects got lower rank were importance of food groups and deficiency disorder with mean score of 54.01 and 53.12 respectively. Tribal women are nutritionally the most vulnerable in India. Though, they are food producers at farm and household level. But their nutritional condition is not very inspiring. Because. Malnutrition is still prevalent at significant levels especially in rural areas. So, they must be encouraged to improve their level of knowledge in different aspects of balanced nutrition.

Data presented in the Table 3 reflects various relationship between selected personal variables and knowledge level of the respondents in different aspects of nutrition practices. It is very clear from the findings that age, mass media and extension contacts have positively and significantly correlated with knowledge at 1 per cent level of significance.

On the other hand, caste and occupation has non-significant relationship with knowledge level of tribal women. This means that caste and occupation did not exert significance influence on the knowledge of tribal women about nutrition practice. This might be due to fact that caste and occupation did not play significant role in formulating knowledge of tribal women about nutrition practices. Respondents of this present investigation were from different caste and had varied occupation, but they were unable to get exposure to gain knowledge regarding nutrition practice. They were not aware about importance of nutrition and regular exercise which are very important at every stage of life.

**CONCLUSION**

In today’s world, nutrition has become an important aspect of life. What we eat and what it is made up of courts more than ever. With more and more

fast food joints opening, it is hard to maintain a healthy stance. Thus, it may be concluded that under nutrition was found in tribal women of all poor-economic classes and age groups. Thus, the enhancement in socio-economic status and declining in poverty have weighty effect on the nutritional status of families. Adequate nutrition is one of the most important factor influencing growth and immunity. A balanced diet must contain the proper amount of protein, carbohydrate, fat, calcium, vitamins, and fiber. As we know it very well that each of these nutrients plays a vital role in the overall growth and development of women. As we all know it very well that nutrition is the key in our lives for our total happiness, both physically and mentally. In order to get suitable nourishment a balanced diet is compulsory. Because, balance diet is referred to food containing the major nutrients such as carbohydrates, proteins, fats, vitamins and minerals in adequate amounts. Hence, food, nutrition and nutrition security are inter-related. Hence, planning of an effective and comprehensive nutrition education programme is very essential with collaboration among different professionals to improve the knowledge level of tribal women.

**CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**

The authors have no conflicts of interest.

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Table 3. Relationship between selected personal variables and knowledge level of the respondent’s in different aspects of nutrition practices	
Selected independent variables	‘r’ value
Age	0.251**
Caste	-0.11*
Occupation	-0.013*
Mass media contacts	0.14**
Extension contacts	0.55**

\*Significant at 5% level, \*\*Significant at 1% level,