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- ✧ **SEVEN AGES OF INDIA'S MONETARY POLICY**
- ✧ **SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF TRIBAL IN THENI DIST.**
- ✧ **CHILD NUTRIENT DEFICIENCY IN KERALA**
- ✧ **ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL DATA**

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# Child Nutrient Deficiency in Kerala – An Assessment

By Jos Chathukulam\*

*As per the Comprehensive National Nutrition Survey 2018, children under five years of age and adolescents in India have serious nutritional deficiencies. The survey also points out that vitamin and micronutrient deficiencies also exist, and it has led to an increase in the rate of morbidity and mortality of children under five years of age in the country. In addition to that, the prevalence of stunting (low height for age), wasting (low weight for height) and underweight (low weight for age) among children of all ages indicate that the issue of nutritional deficiencies still exist and are increasing at an alarming rate in the country.*

**S**tunting, wasting and underweight in children are indicators of malnutrition and under-nutrition. Recognising the importance of nutrition in human development, the member countries of the United Nations including India have adopted a target to eradicate malnutrition in all forms by 2030 as part of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The UN decade of action on nutrition 2016 – 25 targets to reduce the number of stunted children by 40%.

The World Nutrition Report 2018 published by World Health Organization (WHO) points out that malnutrition is a universal problem. As per the World Nutrition Report 2018, among the children under five years of age, 150.80 million are stunted, 50.50 million are wasted and 38.3 million are overweight (body fat rather than optimally healthy). Of the total population of stunted children, 46.60 million, and of the wasted children, more than 50 per cent are in India. In addition to that, the prevalence of morbidity, overweight

and non-communicable diseases among children are also increasing.

## The Methodology Employed for Collecting Data for the Survey

The Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare along with UNICEF and Population Council have conducted a Comprehensive National Nutrition Survey (CNNS), the first ever in India covering 29 states and the report has been available in the public domain. A survey report was prepared after interviewing 1,12,316 children, adolescents and their parents. To get comprehensive data regarding the micronutrient deficiencies in children, information was collected after grouping them into three: (i) pre-school children of 0–4 years, (ii) school age children of 5–9 years and (iii) adolescents of 10–19 years. Blood samples as well as urine and stool of 51,029 individuals, who were interviewed, were also collected, and after analyzing these samples, the detailed report was prepared. Data were collected from both rural and urban areas. The food habits, literacy level of mothers, religion and income of the families of the interviewed children were analyzed in detail.

Kerala has achieved a commendable index when as regards health

sector. Kerala usually tops the health index when compared with other states in India. Be it in the case of tackling infant mortality rate, birth rate and maternal mortality rate, Kerala is on par with other developing countries. The CNNS clearly shows a paradox picture regarding where Kerala stands when it comes to severe nutritional deficiencies like stunting, wasting, underweight as well as the risk posed by lifestyle diseases including obesity and diabetes among the child population.

## Underweight

India has 34 per cent children under 5 years of age who are underweight. Jharkhand, Chattisgarh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh have the highest prevalence of underweight children in the said age bracket. Only Mizoram and Sikkim have children who have the required weight for their age. Kerala has 19 per cent underweight children. Kerala occupies seventh position when it comes to states with lowest prevalence of underweight children. Kerala's position is far behind North Eastern states like Mizoram, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Manipur. In Kerala, six per cent school – going children are underweight and in India the national average is 10 per cent.

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### Wasting

In India, 17 per cent of pre-school children are wasted. In Kerala, 13 per cent children are wasted. But Kerala does not enjoy the top position as regards the list of states with less prevalence of wasting among children. Kerala ranks ninth in the list of states with least prevalence of wasting among children under five years of age. Kerala is behind states like Mizoram, Uttarakhand, Manipur, Punjab, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh and Haryana.

**Stunting:** In Kerala 21 per cent of children up to four years of age are stunted. National average of stunted children is 35 per cent. Kerala is behind states like Jammu and Kashmir, Goa and Tamil Nadu in this regard. The nutrition status of all the BIMARU states, which includes Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh are the worst and these states have the highest percentage of stunted children. In Kerala, 11 per cent children aged 5 – 9 years are stunted and the national average is double. While Kerala has less number of stunted children in the said age brackets when compared with the national average, it is still a serious health issue.

### Overweight Children

Kerala has to give special emphasis regarding the issue of obesity and overweight among children. In Kerala, three per cent pre-school children are overweight. Those studying in primary schools and adolescents are overweight with 10 per cent each. At the national level, it is only two, four and five per cent respectively.

### Iron Deficiency and Anaemia

Kerala has higher number of children with iron deficiency and the prevalence of iron deficiency among children in Kerala is higher than the national average. In India, 32 per

cent of children aged 0 -4 years old have iron deficiency and in Kerala alone, 35 per cent of children have iron deficiency. In the case of school – age children, 18 per cent of them have iron deficiency and 25 per cent adolescents have iron deficiency.

In the case of anaemia, Kerala has less prevalence of anaemia among children. In fact, it is less than the national average but it needs certain degree of concern. In Kerala 13 per cent of children under the age group 0 – 4 years, 3 per cent children studying in primary schools and 9 per cent of the adolescents are anaemic. At the national level it is 41, 24, and 28 per cent respectively.

### Vitamin Deficiency

In Kerala, 17 per cent of pre-school children have 'vitamin A' deficiency and 12 per cent of children in the same age bracket have 'vitamin D' deficiency, nine per cent have Zinc deficiency, four per cent have 'vitamin B' deficiency and 19 per cent have foliate deficiency. Among school-going children, 27 per cent have 'vitamin A' deficiency, 23 per cent have 'Vitamin D' deficiency and 27 per cent have foliate deficiency. Among adolescents, 13 per cent of them have 'vitamin A' deficiency, 32 per cent have 'vitamin D' deficiency and more than half of the adolescents have foliate deficiency. As per the CNNS report, in 12 states including Kerala, the 'vitamin A' deficiency among school – going children is a serious health problem.

### Diabetics and Cholesterol

In Kerala, the prevalence of cholesterol and diabetics among children is higher than the national average. The CNNS indicates that one per cent school – going children in India are suffering from diabetes. In Kerala, the number of children with diabetes is double the national average. In India, 3 per cent school – age children and 4 per cent

adolescents have high cholesterol. In Kerala, it is much higher with 16 per cent school – age children and 14 per cent adolescents.

As per the CNNS report on Kerala, the problem resulting from nutritional deficiency is relatively less. But, Kerala couldn't achieve a top spot in certain health parameters. Kerala ranks fourth among states with low prevalence of stunting among children under five years of age. Kerala ranks third among states with low prevalence of wasting and the state occupies the seventh spot when it comes to low prevalence of underweight among children under five years of age. The prevalence of iron deficiency among children under five years of age and adolescents in Kerala is higher than the national average. The 'Vitamin A and D' deficiency among children under five years of age in Kerala is also higher than the national average.

Kerala has to overcome the complacency syndrome. The Mid-Day Meal Scheme and Supplementary Nutrition Programmes should be revised based on the specific nutritional requirements of infants, children and adolescents. Kerala needs a highly decentralized governance of nutrition programme. The local governments and grass root level institutions such as *Kudumbasree* and other community-based organizations can play a crucial role in this regard. But to make the intervention made by these institutions a meaningful one, a state level nutrition survey on the lines of CNNS should be carried out immediately. An individual-based monitoring mechanism may be suggested for an effective protocol checklist. Our aim should be to mould a healthy generation in which all children have adequate height and weight as required for their age. In addition to that, effective measures should be taken to prevent as well as tackle life style diseases such as diabetics, high levels of cholesterol and obesity. □