

EAT | HEALTHY

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Araku undernourishment study aiding research to save kids

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Undernutrition in adolescents and in children from one year to three years of age continues to be a major challenge in Araku Valley.

Children between the ages of one and three who were screened under the community initiative of the Asara tribal healthcare programme and undertaken by Piramal Foundation, were found to be in the severe and moderate acute undernutrition category.

Nutritionist Shweta Kurella, who works in the area says that women here continue to breastfeed their children till the age of two years and thus "they are not providing the nourishment that is required from one to three years. These children often fall sick and are severely anaemic."

The green, yellow and red bars for nutrition which

ACCORDING TO THE STUDY

32.2% are underweight in tribal areas of united Andhra Pradesh

51%: Stunting in all tribal regions of India.

53%: Deaths in children below five years of age due to undernutrition



■ Deaths in children due to undernutrition are due to pneumonia, diarrhoea and malaria and these are recorded only during various surveys but not reported during the deaths.

have now been set up in a few Araku habitats are helping researchers understand how much nutrition needs of people must be improved.

Millet, ragi, green leafy vegetables and fruits are

cultivated in and around the region but these are sold in the open market.

The milk from the cows is not consumed as it is believed that it is for the calf and not for them.

The locals explained that

their main source of food is the rice and dal provided in government ration shops. Nutrition is thus poor for both genders.

Anaemia is very common and most young girls are identified to be anaemic

when they are pregnant.

The prevalence of stunting, underweight and wasting is as high as 51 per cent, 54.7 per cent and 21 per cent respectively according to a survey carried out by ICMR (Indian Council for Medical Research) in various tribal belts in India.

The death of children below five years of age due to under nutrition is as high as 53 per cent.

The cause of death in most cases is pneumonia, malaria and diarrhoea, according to data tabulated by ICMR from government data in all tribal regions of India.

With nutrition a major challenge, the work at the ground level is to bring about a behaviour change by making the tribals consume what they grow.

The foundation is working with community volunteers and trying to encourage consumption of millets, green leafy vegetables and fruits.

Asara reaches out to tribals

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Six to seven cases of high risk pregnancies suffering from malaria are noted in the Asara Tribal Health Programme every quarter as many pregnant women in the 181 habitats seek their help for institutional child birth.

The screening of these women has brought out the number of them suffering from malaria, Hepatitis B, HIV and also woman with stunted growth who would have problems during child birth.

Stunted or short stature women are those with a height below 145 cm.

While the programme has covered 49,000 pregnant women and improved the percentage of institutional

delivery from 18 per cent to 68 per cent in these habitats, challenges remain as the system of *dia amma* still exists.

These challenges at the ground level require community initiatives and young people from tribal areas are being recruited as volunteers and also trained as nurses.

The cases of malaria and Hepatitis B are tackled by treating pregnant women who come to the centre while HIV cases are reported to the state AIDS control centres.

The relapse of malaria is also noted but only if the woman returns to the centre. Since most of them are now seeking help, relapse of malaria is also being treated but the numbers are yet to be tabulated.

Vishal Phanse, chief executive officer of Piramal Swasthya, said, "We are working from 2011 to bring about a change by making them seek help for child birth. The major problem in remote hill areas has been of transportation. There are places where there is no road and the pregnant woman has to be brought down in a *palki*. Hence, simple means of transportation have been provided there to make it feasible for them to come to the nearest centre."

There are *anganwadis* in habitats that are close to roads, but tribals living on the mountain tops of the Eastern Ghats will have to come down to access healthcare and the distance for some of them can be as much as 40 km.