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Adolescent nutrition: Some areas yet to be intervened

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Nutrition influences growth and development throughout infancy, childhood and adolescence; it is, however, during the period of adolescence that nutrient needs are the greatest. During this adolescent period (10-19 years of age), they gain up to 50 per cent of their adult weight, 20 per cent or more adult height and 50 per cent of their adult skeletal mass (WHO, 2005). Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey 2014 showed approximately 6.2 million (41 per cent) children are stunted among 15 million children under 5 years of age in Bangladesh.



These undernourished children have an increased risk of mortality, illness and infections, delayed development, cognitive deficits, poorer school performance, and fewer years in school. Moreover, 1 in 4 adolescent girls in Bangladesh are undernourished, while 1 in 8 women of reproductive age are stunted. During delivery, stunted women are at higher risk of complications; in addition, the risk of intra-uterine growth retardation is high and, as a result, newborns of these women are more likely to be underweight and very frequently are low birth weight. Therefore, Maternal under nutrition peaks at 38 per cent among women 15-19 years of age who have had a birth in the past 3 years. Early marriage and early pregnancy contribute significantly to these conditions, because stunting thus passes from generation to generation; a vicious cycle of under nutrition is perpetuated. There are differences in under nutrition between rural and urban areas, women and children living in urban slums are especially worse off which is admitted in the national Nutrition Policy 2015 by Government. Ministry of Primary and Mass Education is strongly involved in ensuring adolescent nutrition through school health clinic program, school feeding program, immunization program along with health ministry. Ministry of Food, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock has been playing important role as well.

The current country health plan titled, "Health, Population and Nutrition Sector Programme 2017-2022" has addressed this issue. It tells that advocacy and awareness raising program will be conducted to increase knowledge about importance of adolescent nutrition as well as an Adolescent Nutrition Guideline will be prepared. But sometimes, it is viewed that many types of TV commercials of mouth-watering junk foods are telecasted which do not maintain the appropriate food value and create health hazards, health risk too. Therefore, broadcasting of this type of TV commercials needs to be regulated through a proper guideline. The role of media including the position of Information Ministry is very crucial.

The Press Information Department should follow the international standard during broadcasting any TV Commercials which are contradictory with many existing policies or strategies. Awareness programme should emphasize on creating this feeling that everyone can internalize the theme slogan of running Nutrition Week "Nutrition must be considered if we think of food".

Another important missing part is adequate research focusing on nutritional effects on adolescent boys is very limited. Even, The State of World Children 2016 (by unicef), showed only the girl adolescents data; for example 20 per cent of total population is adolescent in Bangladesh, whereas 34 per cent girl adolescents are married and the adolescent birth rate is 83 per cent which is too high. The other important indicators of adolescents' condition like lower and upper secondary school enrolment; access to mass media; comprehensive knowledge on HIV/AIDS data is only available for girls. But no data on adolescent boys' situation is available.

Therefore, we exactly do not know the after effects of malnutrition of adolescent boys that whether it has any negative impact on societal or behavioural pattern during their matured age. In that context, boy adolescents should get proper attention from the concerned authority and focus should be given to those who are entitled with residential education system specially Madrasa or religious education system. This process can help to ensure the adequate requirements of all adolescents irrespective of their race, gender and other identity. Therefore, present adolescents can play role for the economic growth in future.

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