Gender perspective on dietary behaviour and nutritional status of adolescents living with family in selected slums of Dhaka, Bangladesh

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Background: Adolescence is a transitional period of development from childhood to adulthood characterized by rapid physical, mental and social changes. There are about 36 million adolescents in Bangladesh comprised of 22% of the population. During adolescence, lifetime behaviour are set and provides an opportunity to establish positive dietary behaviour and encourage cultural changes that emphasizes sufficient nutrition in adolescents which can have lifelong impacts on future generation. Due to gender norms, adolescent girls are disproportionately affected by nutritional insufficiency; however, many adolescent boys are also malnourished. Adolescents living in slums are more nutritionally vulnerable than other adolescents. So, we wanted to explore this vulnerability in gender perspective.

Methods: This cross-sectional mixed method research approach was conducted to achieve the objectives. Study population was male and female adolescents aged between 10 to 19 years living in slums of Dhaka, Bangladesh. Quantitative data was collected by household survey of 115 adolescents using a pre-tested structured Bangla questionnaire. In Depth Interview guidelines were adopted for qualitative interviews. Around 12 in-depth interviews were audio-recorded to collect qualitative data.

Results: About 40.4% male and 47.0% female adolescents were underweight. Around 5% male and 3.4% female adolescents were overweight. Only 1.7% females were obese. Almost 66.7% male and 63.8% female adolescents had lowest dietary diversity score. Approximate 33.0% male and 36.2% female adolescents had medium dietary diversity Score. There was association between sex of respondents with eating vegetables and eating fish (p<0.05). Dietary behavior and eating more foods for female adolescents had significant association with sex of respondents (p<0.05). Female adolescents were expected to learn cooking because they had to feed other members of her in-laws’ family, according to the qualitative findings. Food sacrifices were made by females so that other family members could eat more. Conclusion: There is impact of gender in dietary behaviour, nutritional status and nutritional knowledge among male and female adolescents living with family in slums of Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Keyword: adolescents, gender, nutrition, dietary behaviour, Bangladesh.