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Nutritional programming during early years and developmental outcomes of toddlers

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Statement of the Problem: As per WHO, 5% of world's children have some type of disabilities before the year of 14. Developmental delay, a term used when a child doesn't reach developmental milestones within the broad range of what is considered normal are often missed and an early intervention can prevent the potential delay as 75% of brain growth occurs in the crucial period of first 3 years of life. The delay might be in one or more areas: Gross motor skills such as sitting up and fine motor skills such as grasping and manipulating objects, communication and language skills (both understanding language and speaking), self-help skills (like toilet training and dressing), and social skills (such as making eye contact and playing with others). There are limited studies on the nutrition programming, nutritional status and developmental progress of children under 3 year in rural India.

Purpose: To assess the same using a modified developmental milestone assessment tool (based on Bayley Scale of Infant Development).

Methodology & Theoretical Orientation: This In-depth cross sectional ethonographic study from 2 rural clusters of Western India covered 70 children 0-3 years old and assessed the nutritional status of mother and child pairs along with their developmental milestones.

Findings: Results indicated gross food insecurity in terms of availability, accessibility utilization and stability within the households of the mother child pairs in both the clusters which was significantly reflected in the finer and gross developmental domain of the toddlers.

Conclusion & Significance: Growth and development during the first 1,000 days is faster than during any other period in life which emphasizes the need for dietary diversity and relative nutritional requirements for mother and child during this period. While initially the health and nutrition status of the mother play a pivotal role, adequate and timely provision of complementary food and good infant and young child feeding practices along with a healthy environment enables the child to grow as well as develop both mind as well as body.

Recommendations: Early nutrition programming especially in rural mothers who are illiterate and have food insecurity is needed as the window of opportunity to nutritionally support the quality of child growth and metabolic health extends from preconception into pregnancy and continues throughout the postnatal period.

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