

Nutritional status of emancipated (mukta) Kamlahris of Nepal

Neupane U¹, Bhaskar RK², Khadka A³, Pokharel PK⁴ and Yadav BK⁵

¹District Health Office, Salyan, Nepal

²District Health Office, Ilam, Nepal

³Apollo College of Nursing, Chennai, India

^{4,5}School of Public Health BPKIHS, Dharan, Nepal

Background: Unmarried girls between the age of five and 14, who work as child caretakers and house maids are referred as *Kamlahris*, and as indentured servants, they work for 14 to 18 hours per day. This bonded child labor system was declared illegal by the government of Nepal in 2000. The government soon realized the need to liberate these girls from their masters in 2005. However, some of these girls are still compelled to work as *Kamlahris* due to extreme poverty.

There is no information and research on the nutritional status of these emancipated *Kamlahris* in Nepal. It is envisaged that the data could serve as baseline for future studies, as well as inform the public health policy. Thus, this study aims to assess the prevalence of malnutrition and anemia among Emancipated *Kamlahris*.

Method: A cross sectional study was conducted among randomly selected 452 emancipated *Kamlahris*. Data were collected using pre tested questionnaire by direct interviews, observations, focus groups and key informant interviews.

Results: The average Body Mass Index (BMI) score was 18.59 kg/m² with SD 2.15. According to the World Health Organization's (WHO) cut off values, 26.3% were in the thinness grade I, 12.8% were in grade II, and 11.1% were in grade III. Likewise, mean hemoglobin level was 10.07 g/dl with SD 0.94. Furthermore, more than two-thirds (66.7%) were mildly anemic, about one-third (29.4%) were moderately anemic, and 0.5% were severely anemic.

Conclusion: There is an alarming condition of malnutrition among the emancipated *Kamlahris* in Nepal, which warrants further study. This group of girls, along with their families, needs special attention to promote their health and well being.

Keywords: BMI; Anemia; *Kamlahri*; Malnutrition; Nepal

uttam.neupane37@gmail.com; uttam.neupane@hotmail.com