

One-third A.P. children stunted: survey

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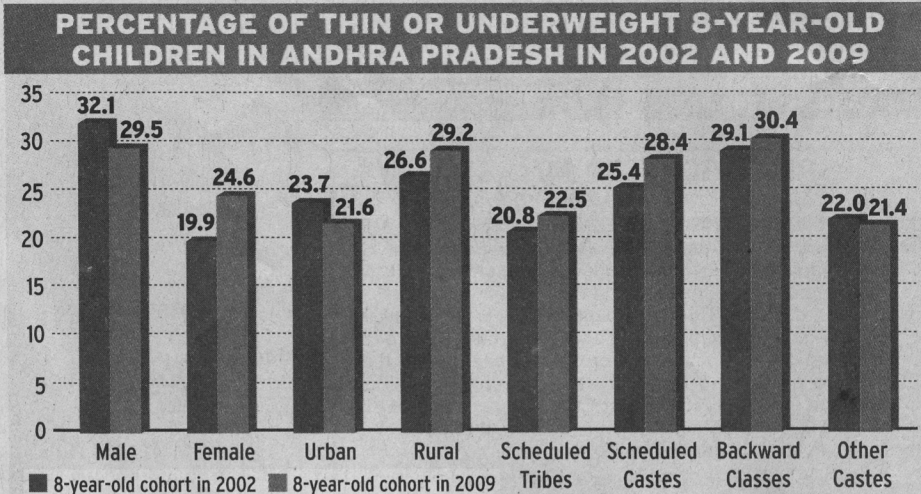
NEW DELHI: One-third of children in Andhra Pradesh are stunted despite falling poverty, considerable economic growth and the development of significant policies, a new survey has shown. Stunting has serious long-term implications for health, psycho-social well-being and educational achievement.

The report "The Impact of Growth on Childhood Poverty in Andhra Pradesh," done by Young Lives as part of an international study on childhood poverty, also points out that despite higher enrolment, drop-out and school quality remain critical issues.

Key indicators

The report presents initial findings from the third round of data collected by Young Lives in the State, carried out from late 2009 to early 2010 with two cohorts of children. It gives a broad outline of some of the key indicators of childhood poverty and changes that have taken place in the children's lives between the earlier survey rounds in 2002 and 2006 and this round.

Around one in four (27 per cent of Younger Cohort [YC] who were aged 6-18 months in 2001 and were 8 years in 2009) children have low body



Note: The above figure shows the percentage of thin/underweight children has increased from 2002 to 2009, especially for vulnerable groups like STs, SCs and girls, and also in rural areas.

Source: Young Lives report

mass index for age, while almost one in three are stunted (low height for age) at 8 years though it has fallen from 33 per cent at 5 years. In 2009, YC children in rural areas were experiencing a higher prevalence of low BMI for age (29 per cent) as well as stunting (34 per cent) than children from urban areas (for whom the corresponding figures were 22 per cent and 16 per cent).

Reasons

Comparing the Older and Younger Cohorts at 8 years

suggests a very slight decline in stunting rates between 2002 and 2009 (3 percentage points). The Older Cohorts were 7.5 to 8.5 years of age in 2002.

There are various reasons for the high prevalence of under-nutrition, including food security, insufficient nutrient intake, diseases burden and lately food inflation.

In line with other indicators, the experience of both stunting and thinness (BMI) is patterned by caste or ethnic background. Comparing the two cohorts in 2002 and 2009

— when they were both aged 8 — suggests stunting rates went down for the other castes groups and backward classes but hardly moved for Scheduled Castes and actually increased for children from Scheduled Tribe backgrounds.

In 2006, 96 per cent of Younger Cohort children (then aged 5 years) were enrolled in either primary or pre-school and by 2010 this percentage had gone up to 98 per cent.

However, in Older Cohort enrolment has fallen from 98

per cent in 2002 to 90 per cent in 2006 and further 77 per cent in 2010 — indicating a high drop-out rate with more girls dropping out than boys.

Similarly, the findings also show a considerable shift to private education. In 2002, 23 per cent of Young Lives children were attending private primary schools at the age of 8 years; by 2009 this went up to 44 per cent. Though many families make substantial sacrifices to afford private education, disadvantaged social groups and girls are much less likely to go to a private school.

Young Lives is a long-term international research study investigating the changing nature of childhood poverty in four developing countries — Ethiopia, India (Andhra Pradesh), Peru and Vietnam — over 15 years, the timeframe set by the U.N. to assess progress towards the U.N. millennium development goals.

It is following two groups of children in each country: 2,000 children who were born in 2001-02 and 1,000 children born in 1994-95.

In Andhra Pradesh, Young Lives collects data in 20 sentinel sites across 3 geographic regions — Central Andhra, Rayalaseema and Telangana.