

GENDER DISPARITY IN CHILD HEALTH CARE IN INDIA: A REVIEW OF FACTS FOR CORRECTIVE ACTION

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Gender inequality exists in every country, but it varies in degree. According to the Human Development Report of 2006, the three top ranking countries in the gender-related development index (GDI) are Norway, Iceland and Australia. Norway tops with the GDI value of 0.962 in the list of 177 countries. A GDI value of 1.00 indicates a maximum achievement in basic capabilities without any gender bias. India ranks 126 in this list with the GDI value of 0.591, showing that women and children in the country suffer the double deprivation of gender disparity and low achievement (UNDP, 2006). From the successive Census results, female disadvantage is evident in India from the constantly declining sex ratio, lower literacy rate of females than males and lower participation of women than men in the work force, e.g. the sex ratio (females per 1000 males) declined from 972 in 1901 to 933 in 2001.

There has been a resurgence of interest in recent years on the issue of gender differentials in child health and mortality. Sex-linked differential treatment of children has often been found to be the major reason for the differentials in mortality of boys and girls. Varying degrees of discrimination of the girl child in both preventive and curative care have also been reported among Indian States. Given this background, this study looks at the various dimensions of gender disparity in health care and nutrition among the children of India.

With the existing regional differentials in various development indicators, this study also looks at the magnitude of gender differentials in childhood feeding, morbidity, treatment of illness and nutrition in different States of India. This study uses data from National Family Health Survey-2 where detailed information was collected on breastfeeding, supplementary feeding, immunization, treatment sought for common childhood illness. Using this information, gender differentials in various indicators of child health care has been analysed for major States of India. Further the study also addresses some of the major determinants of gender differentials in child care. The study finds the existence of significant gender differentials in many indicators of child health care in India.