

Trends and Socioeconomic Disparities in Undernutrition among Muslim Women in India: Evidence from the Last Decades (1998 – 2021)

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Abstract:

The nutritional status of a woman is an important factor in determining her overall well-being. This study critically examines the trends in undernutrition among Muslim women (one of the most socio-economically disadvantaged sections) in India and its different geographical regions. Also, the prevalence and trends (including socioeconomic variations) of undernutrition (captured by underweight using BMI) among Muslim Women have been investigated across the dimensions of caste, place of residence (rural/urban), education, and economic status. The data are drawn from the nationally representative National Family Health Surveys (NFHS) of India from 1998 to 2021. The results using poor-rich ratios, concentration indices, disparity ratios and predicted probabilities of being underweight show that the prevalence of undernutrition among Muslim women (as well as Indian women as a whole) has declined over the 1998-2021 period. However, there are stark socio-economic (based on caste, education, geographic region, place of residence and wealth) variations in undernutrition. Further, the prevalence of undernutrition has decreased over time for all socioeconomic groups, but the disparities (both within as well as between groups) remain very high and have widened in most instances. Among multiple socio-economic subgroups (such as among Muslim women with no formal education or Muslim women in the Central and Northeast regions, etc.), the disparity in undernutrition has more than doubled over the 1998-2021 period. Even for the regions (such as the South) where the prevalence of undernutrition is low (or has decreased), the disparities in undernutrition are high and have increased in general.