

Socio-Economic Determinants of Infant Mortality: An Analysis of Two Indian States

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The study of infant mortality has been attracting nation wide attention because of considerable depletion of population during the stage of infancy, which has a major contribution of reducing life expectancy of the population. The infant and child mortality rates are considered to be sensitive indicators of socio -economic and health conditions prevailing in a community. They are often used to reflect the state of public health, environmental sanitation, socio-economic development and the people's attitude towards the value of human life itself in a country.

India is a state with various social, religious and ethnic groups. Their living standard, food habits, literacy level, sanitary conditions, nutritional status, utilization of health services and the pattern of child bearing and rearing are rooted in their social value and norms. Although a lot of inputs have been given in health sector to reduce the high infant mortality, no significant achievements have been made till now in India. Since the Infant mortality rate is a pooled average value experienced by various cultural groups and communities, it is quite possible that there may be such areas and communities having high infant mortality rate, which may be keeping the overall infant mortality rate of a community at higher level.

The main objectives of this paper is to make an attempt to find out the factors which are responsible for the lowest infant mortality in the state of Kerala (IMR-11), and its comparison with Orissa, the state having highest infant mortality (IMR-90) in 2002 in India. Infant mortality in India is 66/1000 of live births, whereas there is high variation in the IMR at inter-state level.

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If we see demographically than we will find that Kerala is the best state and Orissa is one of the worst state of India. According to the Sample Registration System the birth rate in India is 25, whereas, it is 16.9 in Kerala and 23.2 in Orissa in 2002. Death rate for India is 8.1, which varies 6.4 to 9.8 in the states of Kerala and Orissa respectively. In terms of sex ratio Kerala is the only state having more number of females than males, it has 1058 females per 1000 of males according to the 2001 census. Sex ratio for India is 933 and for Orissa it is 979.

Female literacy is one of the most important factors determining the infant mortality. There is an inverse correlation between the female literacy and infant mortality in almost all the countries of the world, because when a woman becomes literate she becomes more and more conscious about the rearing and caring of her child. As a result she will try to avail the antenatal and postnatal facilities to be free from the risk factor. She becomes conscious of nutritional care of both herself and the infant. According the 2001 census of India, the literacy rate for India is 65.38, whereas for male it is 75.85 and for female 54.16. Kerala is the state having highest literacy in India, both male and female. According the 2001 census, Kerala is having 90.92 literacy rate, where as for male it is 94.20 and for female 87.86. In the state of Orissa total literacy is 63.61, having 75.95 and 50.97 literacy rates for both male and female respectively.

The empirical analysis has been conducted based on data compiled from different sources viz., Sample Registration System, National Family and Health Survey- I&II and Census of India. The study found that these socio-economic and demographic factors differ significantly between these states. This analysis also brings out that the planning and policies, which are in operation in the state of Kerala, if applied to Orissa, would reduce the infant mortality to a considerable extent.