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Health and Nutritional Status of Jarawas and Sentinelese

Jarawas and Sentinelese are still hostile to outsiders and nothing is known about their health and nutritional status. As a part of the pilot project undertaken by Andaman and Nicobar Administration till date eight contact expeditions has been conducted to their areas and 122 Jarawas out of the estimated population of 250 have been contacted. The findings of the health and nutritional studies conducted by the medical epidemiologist of this Centre during these visits are as under.

The age and sex distribution of the contacted group appears to be balanced and their sex ratio of 906.3 women per 1000 men appears to be much better than for other tribes like Shompens. From information about births and childhood deaths obtained from several ever-married Jarawa women, it was found that there are on an average 5.3 live births per ever-married women and an estimated 390 live births per 1000 married women years. These figures are very high comparative to similar statistics of Indian women. It was estimated from the data about childhood deaths that childhood mortality rates are very high at 435 deaths per 1000 live births. The Jarawa men and women are shorter and heavier compared to rural Indians of corresponding age and sex. The mean values of BMI for Jarawa adults are higher than that of rural Indians in corresponding age group and sex. As a whole the Jarawa adults seem to have a satisfactory nutritional status. In contrast more than 29% of the children have weight for height \leq 2 SD less than NCHS reference data for their age and sex. Malnutrition is not very common among older children. Clinical signs of anaemia were found in many of the contacted Jarawas particularly in pregnant and lactating women and children. Conjunctival xerosis was observed in a few of them but no children with Bitot's spots were seen. Other common morbidities observed among them were abrasions and lacerations of the skin, traumatic injuries, skin infections and upper respiratory infections. The project is in progress.

The contact group attempted to contact the Sentinelese during their two visits. Though the party could not go ashore 49 and 15 persons belonging to the tribe could be observed from a distance during these visits. Hence no observations on their health and nutritional status could be made. However most of them appeared to be well built and active.