

Najma Rizvi

International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, GPO Box 128, Dacca,

Bangladesh

Diarrhoea, a serious health hazard for children in Bangladesh cannot be controlled without knowing the local beliefs about the causes and cures of diarrhoea. In the local system of belief, preventive or curative measures are directly linked to the causative factors.

This paper studies the beliefs about the causes of diarrhoea and the preventive and curative measures associated with it, in both rural and urban settings. Fifty-seven households, 25 rural and 32 urban, belonging to different socio-economic groups form the study sample. To collect information on causes and cures of diarrhoea, participant observation and interviewing techniques were used. Our results show that there is no significant difference in the belief system along rural/urban lines. In both groups diarrhoea is explained by both natural and supernatural factors. Dysentery (Amasha) and worm infestation (Krimi) are generally not attributed to supernatural causes, therefore the recommended measures both preventive and curative, are food related. Diarrhoea in breast fed babies and chronic diarrhoea are explained through supernatural causes, such as "bad air" and "evil eye". An analysis of our data shows that when the fear of contracting a disease is high, adherence to the belief is the strongest and this results in delay in the introduction of solid foods and withdrawal of foods in diarrhoea. A public health message emerging from the study is that, health education messages will go unheeded until the incidence of diarrhoea and the associated fear are significantly reduced.

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