



## Information Note 2

# Understanding Gender-based Food Taboos within Poor Households in Uttar Pradesh

## Background

India's food safety nets reach millions of vulnerable households each month to improve access to food. However, the decisions on how food is shared within the household determines individual food and nutrition security. These decisions are mostly dictated by prevailing social norms, which are often biased against women and girls.

The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) in India supports the Government in improving the coverage, operational efficiency and quality of food-based safety nets.

In late 2019, WFP conducted a study in two districts of Uttar Pradesh to understand the norms and practices that govern food distribution and consumption within the household and assess how they influence food consumption by members, particularly women and girls.

This information note summarizes results from the study on gender equity in food consumption within household.



### SURVEY DETAILS

**Partners:** WFP and Society for Advancement of Resourceless by Training and Handholding (SAMARTH)

**Month of data collection:** December 2019

**Locations surveyed:** Fatehpur (Rural); Lucknow (Urban poor)

**Quantitative:** Household survey of 400 households (250 Rural; 150 Urban)

**Qualitative:** Focus group discussions (8); In-depth interviews with community women (20), In-depth interviews with community health workers (10); Key informant interviews (6)

## Gender-based Food Taboos and Restrictions

- Most **food taboos and restrictions** were associated with women and children,

### ▶ Pregnant women

• Should eat less and avoid fruits, Non-vegetarian foods, and some vegetables (brinjal, drumsticks), which may lead to adverse consequences/birth outcome.

### ▶ Adolescent girls

• Not to eat sour food including sour fruits.

### ▶ Children

• Avoid eating 'cold' foods like yogurt, raw vegetables like raddish or seasonal fruits such as orange during winter. If children consume these foods they could fall ill.

particularly pregnant women, adolescent girls and young children.

- In rural areas, most people suggested that **pregnant women** should avoid eating dry fruits. Eating coconut was recommended as it was believed to make the child more fair.
- The consumption of papaya **was forbidden during pregnancy**. This was reinforced through anecdotal evidence shared by the women.

*“Once I had papaya during my pregnancy I liked papaya a lot and one day I had only papaya. Then suddenly I started feeling uneasy and started bleeding”.* – **Community woman, Fatehpur**

- **Restrictions on consumption** of fruits (banana, papaya, jackfruit, coconut), vegetables (brinjal, leafy vegetables), meat, fish, and eggs during pregnancy were considered necessary to

*“If a pregnant lady eats less the baby will not grow too large. Also, eat less fruits otherwise, the baby grows in size, and then it is difficult to deliver.”*

– **Service Provider, Fatehpur**

prevent miscarriage, promote easy delivery, and prevent fetal malformations.

- Food restrictions for **adolescent girls** were associated with menstrual health. One restriction reported was on consumption of sour foods.
- **Children were restricted from consuming foods** that were considered 'cold', such as rice, oranges, raddish, etc., which could cause illnesses, particularly cold or respiratory infections. These restrictions were enforced especially during the winter season.
- **Consumption of ghee or oil** was considered as beneficial for the health of children.

### Recommendation

- There is a need to **enhance nutrition education and awareness** among all community members, particularly on the nutrition of young children, adolescent girls and pregnant and lactating women.

Cover illustration by: WFP/SanjnaSudan

This note has been produced as a part of four-part series based on WFP India's study titled 'Who eats when, what and how much?'. The study aims at understanding intra-household food patterns within poor households in two locations in Uttar Pradesh, India. Find other notes in this series here: [bit.ly/2MvLOxt](https://bit.ly/2MvLOxt)



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