

Acknowledgements

The present study has been carried out among adolescent girls of Sikkim, an eastern Himalayan State of India. At every phase of study, many people have been involved and their collective efforts led to the successful accomplishment of the work. It is a great pleasure to convey my gratitude to those who not only rendered help, but also provided unending encouragement and moral support to conduct and complete this study.

First and foremost, I would like to thank the study participants and their parents for their unhesitating and enthusiastic cooperation to a complete stranger, by providing necessary information on many issues, at the cost of their valuable time and conveniences. I am really moved by their generosity and hospitality which made my stay pleasant during fieldwork.

I feel greatly honoured in expressing my profound gratitude to my research supervisor Dr. Susmita Mukhopadhyay for her continuous academic support since the inception of the study. Without her affectionate, caring and thought provoking guidance in each and every step, this work would never have been completed. Her passion for work, research insight and expertise enriched my growth as a student and as a researcher. I am indebted to her for motivating me to attend various conferences, workshops and scientific programmes in India and abroad. Above all and the most needed, she provided me unflinching encouragement and gracious support in various ways which enabled me to complete the work successfully.

I convey my profound debt to Professor Barun Mukhopadhyay for his consistent encouragement and continuous support at every step of this work. His enlivening motivation and willingness to share his thoughts has been fruitful for shaping my ideas in research. I really feel honoured and fortunate to work with him. Without his active participation in the major events of the study, this thesis would not have come into existence.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Subrata K Roy for his benevolent help and numerous valuable suggestions at many stages of this study, and also Dr T.S. Vasulu, and Professor Premanand Bharati for providing me academic support which facilitated this work. I am highly obliged to Professor Tulika Sen, Professor Amitabh Basu, Professor Ranjan Gupta, and Dr. Arup

Ratan Bandyopadhyay for evaluating the progress of my work and for providing numerous valuable suggestions.

Mr. Baidyanath Pal is thankfully acknowledged for sharing his expertise during the data analyses. I would like to warmly thank Mr. Rajib Bardhan, Mr. Dilip K. Bhattacharya, Mrs. Nilima Pal, the office staff at Biological Anthropology Unit (BAU) of the Indian Statistical Institute (ISI), for their administrative support and technical assistance.

Special thanks are due to Dr. B. R. Mondal, Dr. Arupendra Mozumdar, Dr. Sobhanjan Sarkar, Sujata Kar, Arpita Sarkar, Dr. Mahua Sengupta, Dr. Suman Chakraborty, Dr. S. Kritika, Sadaruddin Biswas, Suvendu Maji, Bhubon Mohan Das, Moumita Maity, Uposoma Sinha, and Abhijit Roy for their cooperation, help, and academic discussions during research work at BAU. Many thanks go to Sujita Sampang and Nadira Mallick for their unparalleled assistance during strenuous fieldwork and data transcription, respectively.

Thanks are due to the Indian Statistical Institute for financial and logistic support. Dean of Studies and the staff of the Dean's office, as well as the Professor-in-Charge, Biological Sciences Division and the staff, Head, Biological Anthropology Unit, and the Reprography Unit are gratefully acknowledged for providing help and assistance of various kinds. I thankfully acknowledge the help and cooperation rendered by the members of Ph. D. Committee in Anthropology and Ph. D. Section, University of Calcutta.

I convey my gratitude to my former teachers who have helped me in one or the other way to get started on this path. In particular, I would like to thank Dr. Subha Ray, University of Calcutta (formerly of University of Allahabad) for introducing me to the beautiful world of Anthropology, and to Professor Vijay S Sahay, University of Allahabad, who nurtured me through his academic discussions during post-graduation. I am immensely thankful to Dr. Prashant Pathak, of Population Studies Unit, ISI for academic and moral support.

In connection with the fieldwork, I received various kinds of help from many people for conducting the fieldwork in all the four districts of Sikkim. I owe profound debts to Dr. Bimal Rai, Chief Medical Officer (CMO), South district, Dr. Govin B. Lama, CMO, East district, Dr. I. L. Sharma, CMO, North district, Dr. Thinley Bhutia, CMO, West district, and Dr. Chitra R. Pradhan, District Health Education Officer, West district, for providing academic, administrative, and other various kinds of

support, and consistent encouragement during entire period of fieldwork. I am indebted to Mr. Karma Gyatso, Secretary, Department of Health and Family Welfare, Government of Sikkim for his encouragement and administrative support. I am immensely grateful to Dr. Yogesh Verma and Dr. (Mrs.) Renu Verma for providing technical support regarding biochemical examination and also for rendering all the necessary help for collection of blood samples in urban areas. Thanks are due to Dr. Karma Bhutia, and Mr. Bipin Chettri for providing help regarding biochemical examination and collection of blood samples in suburban and rural areas.

Logistic help provided by Md. Akhtar, is thankfully acknowledged. I am indebted to Bimal Ghosh, Saleem, Ramesh, Rajen, Manoj, and Tapan who individually took care of my well being during my stay in Gangtok.

I convey my special thanks to Sandhya Rai, Marina Lepcha, D Lepcha, Tara Adhikari, Kumar Tamang, Dhan Singh Biswa, Narendra Rai, Passag Eden, Chandravati Rai, Bunu Gurung, Krishna Gurung, Tshering Phuti, Alka Subba, M. B. Subba who helped collecting data by accompanying me in the urban, suburban and rural areas. I convey my sincere tribute to Neeta Rai, who passed away last year. I will always remember her for her enthusiastic help and charming company which we all cherished. I also want to thank Patibha Rai and Chandra Rai for their excellent jobs as phlebotomist.

I express my heartfelt thanks to Mr. Sanjeev Bakshi and Dr. (Mrs.) Durga Sharma who were always there for me during my times of distress and were a constant source of inspiration, encouragement, and support away from home. I always remain thankful to them for both academic and moral support rendered by them. I am also thankful to Dr. Satya Prakash Ojha who made my hostel life cheerful and provided moral and academic support.

It is a unique privilege to express my veneration to my loving parents and to all my family members who deserve more than a written acknowledgement. They provided me all kinds of practical, emotional and scrupulous support in every step of the study and bestowed their pious blessings. Last but not least, my heartiest thanks go to my younger brothers and my lovely sister for reinforcing my spirits at crucial junctures of my life and for providing encouragement and moral support.

Shailendra K Mishra