
Impact of Malnutrition Among Children on Child Mortality in Developing Countries

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ABSTRACT: Malnutrition among children can be a leading cause of the increase in child mortality rate in developing nations. Although malnutrition does not directly become the cause of death among children it can effectively damage the immune system of children making them vulnerable to fatal diseases and infections. Considering the prevalence of malnutrition, the primary goal of this paper is to analyse the impact of malnutrition on child mortality in developing nations. Relevant secondary qualitative data is from authentic websites and journals have been gathered to establish the findings of this study. The findings of this study establish that malnourished children are more prone to dying from common diseases such as diarrhea, pneumonia, and others. Developing nations in this regard have the most cases of child mortality. Necessary, preventive, and effective government interventions are absolutely essential to eradicate child mortality due to malnutrition.

KEYWORDS: Malnutrition, Child Mortality, Developing Country.

INTRODUCTION

Malnutrition can be defined as a “lack of nutrition” in individuals. The main reasons behind this are either not having enough to eat, being unable to properly absorb and use the nutrients from the food consumed or not consuming the right food for physical development and growth. Children suffering from malnutrition eventually develop various other diseases due to not having enough nutrients in the physical system making it a severe problem. Often malnutrition can lead to child mortality either at the infant stage or even later on due to compromised immune systems. Developing countries in this regard suffer the most cases of child mortality due to malnutrition, unfortunately making it quite a common phenomenon. Multiple African and Asian countries, due to extensive poverty are noted to have a great number of children suffering from malnutrition. This is not only damaging for a country with respect to the health of the entire demography, rather it damages the possibility of heightened economic growth.

Since children are considered to be the future of a country, a country can never reach its true potential when the health of children is compromised due to reasons such as malnutrition leading to child mortality. The negative impacts of malnutrition make it absolutely necessary that the reasons and implications of malnutrition among children in developing countries are analysed to ensure that necessary steps can be taken in this regard to eliminate the damaging consequences of malnutrition such as child mortality. This article in this respect aims at critically discussing and analysing the overall impact of malnutrition among children on child mortality with specific reference to developing countries.

OBJECTIVES

Since malnutrition is a global issue and despite economic and technological development malnutrition could not be effectively minimised, let alone completely eradicated, studying the reasons and impact of malnutrition will help better understand the issue. The main aim of this study is to analyse and critically evaluate the impact of malnutrition among children on the overall child mortality rate in developing countries.

- To analyse the reasons and conditions of malnutrition among children in developing countries.
- To evaluate the negative impacts of malnutrition on child mortality rate in developing countries.

METHODOLOGY

Analysis of the impact of malnutrition on the child mortality rate has become considerably important in recent times. Since child mortality, although could be reduced, it could not be completely eradicated even with the advancement of society in all other aspects, especially in the case of developing nations. In this context, this study has gathered necessary qualitative data from secondary sources to develop a comprehensive understanding of the impact of child malnutrition on child mortality in developing

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countries. The evaluation of secondary qualitative data requires a great understanding of the collected datasets to establish the findings in an effective manner. Qualitative data from various authentic websites like Global Hunger Index, WHO, and journals have been considered to evaluate the impact of malnutrition among children on child mortality, especially in developing nations. To analyze the data, Microsoft Excel and descriptive statistics were used. The analysis was done on the impact of malnutrition among children on child mortality in the selected developing countries.

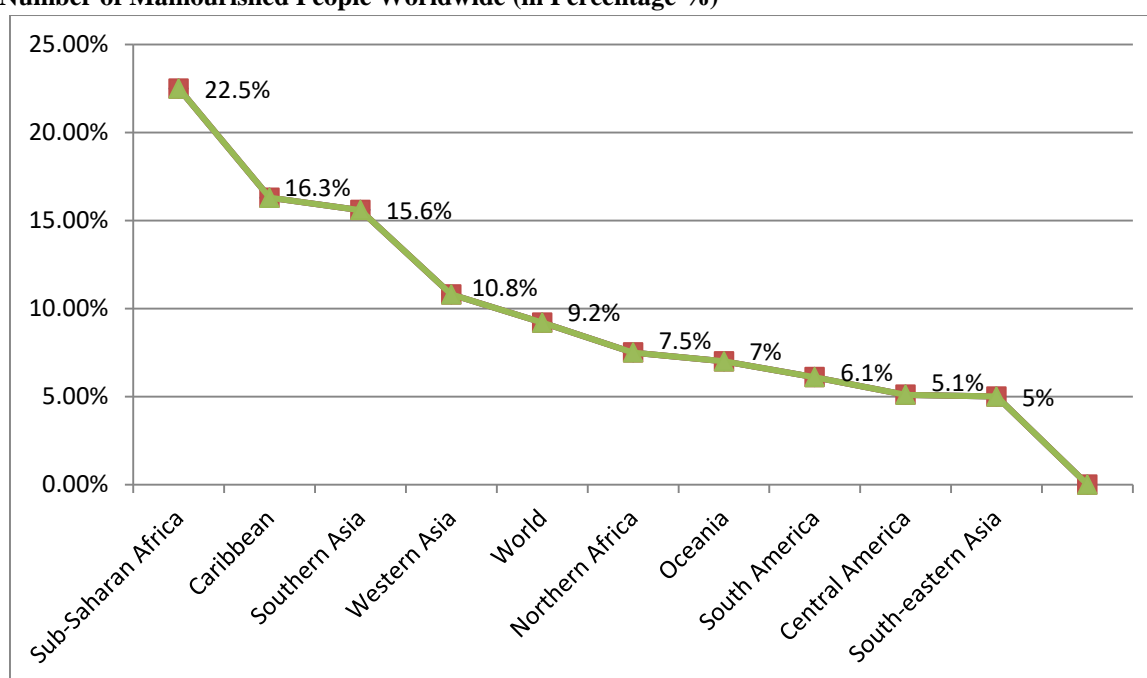
DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Malnutrition among children has become one of the most significant concerns of humankind in today's world as it can be highly damaging to the comprehensive growth of the economy of a country. Moreover, concerns such as these can literally restrict a country from reaching its true potential in terms of human health conditions. Recent studies have established that issues related to malnutrition have become quite common as every 1 among 5 children could not reach "growth potential" in 2017. The 40 per cent of the children in South Asia are affected by stunting and more than 1 in 14 children are wasted due to malnutrition in the world (Adepoju and Allen, 2019). Despite technological and economic advancement, even in developing countries, it seems that the world lacks effort in terms of mitigating the risk of malnutrition among children. It comes as a shock that malnutrition remains one of the most significant causes of lost potential, morbidity, and mortality among children in current times.

Even though the right to a dignified life with basic amenities such as food and nutrition is considered to a one of the fundamental rights in most of the developing countries, it seems that such countries lack in resources, motivation and incentive to eradicate problems related to malnutrition completely. Multiple measures to analyse the scope of malnutrition among the children have been developed yet not all of such measures are considered when it comes to treatment. Studies have shown that malnourished children are often prone to suffering from various diseases and the risk of death is high. Although such is the scenario, in the case of "severe acute malnutrition" and children, only a low "weight-for-height Z score" is considered to treat malnourished children and the low measure of "mid-upper arm circumference" among the children is disregarded even though such malnourished children pose the same risk of death (Schwinger *et al.* 2019). Such wrongful measures regarding the treatment of malnourishment increase the child mortality rate in developing countries.

Socio-economic factors such as low household income, and social status that lead to malnutrition cannot be disregarded as well, often in developing countries, people have to spend the majority of their income for food. People become more focused on satiety rather than the right nutrients that the human body needs for growth. This leads to stunting and wasting of the children. According to recent data gathered by UNICEF, 2.3 million newborns, and 2.1 million individuals aged between 5 to 24 years, 43% among whom are adolescents, in total, more than 5 million children have died in 2021 due to malnutrition worldwide (UNICEF-2022). Most of such great death rates could have been prevented with proper nutrition, water, and sanitation. Data show that children born in low-income developing countries are 14 times more likely to die before reaching the age of 5 compared to children born in high-income developed countries. Due to persisting inequities among the countries, most newborns that have a better chance at survival die an unfortunate and untimely death.

Figure 1: Number of Malnourished People Worldwide (in Percentage %)



(Source: Global Hunger Index 2022)

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As per the data presented above, the prevalence of malnutrition among individuals in developing countries is higher compared to developed countries. According to the World Hunger Index (2022), malnutrition is one of the most common contributors to the “disease burden” worldwide and accounts for even “more than one-third” of global child deaths. Malnutrition does not necessarily become the cause of death, rather leads to the weakening of the immune system among the children and since the recovery rate becomes considerably low, children suffering from malnutrition end up dying due to some other direct disease affecting them. It is noted that in the case of “severe acute malnutrition”, individuals suffered from diarrhea disease which became the primary cause of death. Studies also found that the “mortality sex ratio” of males and females was 1.6:1 implying that males are more prone to dying due to malnutrition compared to females. Considering such facts, government intervention in the area of providing good nutrients to children must be ensured.

Government intervention can effectively reduce child and infant mortality rates in developing nations regarding malnutrition as it is noted that most of such deaths are preventable. Even though the numbers of child mortality is great in recent times it can be said that due to various measures taken since the 1990s child mortality rate could be reduced from 12.8 million to 5 million in 2021 (WHO2022). The number of neonatal deaths has reduced globally as well as the data suggests that recent times there have been only 2.3 million neonatal deaths in 2021 (WHO2022). Although the number has decreased significantly, it is noted that the reduction rate was comparatively slower. Malnutrition among mothers is one of the leading causes of malnutrition in newborn babies leading to their death. Since most people in developing countries, lack basic sustenance, it is natural for the children to suffer from malnutrition without necessary intervention from the relevant authorities.

Table 1: Countries with the Highest Child Mortality Rate (Rs. in crores.)

Country	Under Five Deaths	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Nigeria	0.0844	0.0645	0.114
India	0.0783	0.0688	0.0882
Pakistan	0.0389	0.0320	0.0469
Democratic Republic of the Congo	0.0284	0.0177	0.0455
Ethiopia	0.0173	0.0138	0.0215
China	0.0121	0.0110	0.0135
Indonesia	0.0110	0.0089	0.0136
United Republic of Tanzania	0.0102	0.0073	0.0144
Angola	0.0091	0.0040	0.0178
Bangladesh	0.0084	0.0076	0.0093

(Source: WHO, 2022)

It has become quite evident that lack of education incorporated with social and economic poverty leads to the prevalence of malnutrition among children. As per the above data, the highest rate of child mortality is prevalent in developing countries such as Nigeria, India, Pakistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, and others (WHO2022). All these countries either belong to the list of developing or underdeveloped countries. These countries do not only lack in resources but rather the persistence of inequality in society and lack of expenditure in healthcare leads to a heightened rate of child mortality. It is noted that malnourished children are more vulnerable to infections compared to normal children. However, effective monitoring of the malnutrition rate and its effect on the overall health condition of children can decrease the rate of child mortality and morbidity in developing nations. Necessary government incentives, intervention programs and awareness generation among the general population can serve as mitigating the measures for the reduction of malnutrition among children

Despite the green and white revolution in developing nations, the children do not have enough nutrients in their food which eventually leads to their deaths. According to the government reports from various developing countries, it has become evident that malnutrition cannot be considered a direct reason for death among children rather it can significantly increase mortality and morbidity by decreasing resistance to infection (PIB-2019). Most of the parents belonging to a socially and economically backward population in developing countries do not have enough knowledge regarding the nutritional value of food and lack the resources to provide nutrients to their children. Having more children without proper resources to sustain them can be attributed to a leading cause of malnutrition among children in developing economies as well. Additionally, “public health expenditure” in developing countries is considerably low leading to an increased rate of child mortality due to malnutrition. Increased expenditure in such areas can prevent child morbidity and mortality effectively and helps to eradicate malnutrition among children.

Malnutrition in developing countries is one of the key causes of under-five children as the majority of the population cannot access the adequate nutrition due to such population living below the poverty line. Necessary intervention measures by the government serve as mitigating action to deal with poverty thus increasing the possibility of providing the right nutrition to future generations, death due to malnutrition among children is quite common. Although malnutrition is not the primary cause of death children suffering from malnutrition are more prone to succumbing to common diseases such as diarrhoea, malaria, pneumonia

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and others. “Common childhood illnesses” such as these particularly affect malnourished children and it has been noted that more than 45 per cent of children below 5 years died from common illnesses where nutrition-related factors contributed greatly (WHO 2020). It is further noted that based on localities and countries, there is a difference in child mortality. Sub-Saharan regions of Africa have the most occurrence of child mortality.

Since malnutrition can be one of the leading causes of child mortality, it is noted that developing countries suffering most despite government interventions. More than half of the child mortality due to malnutrition, happens in countries such as India, Nigeria, Pakistan, Ethiopia and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Nigeria and India almost account for one-third of all child deaths (WHO 2020). Childhood malnutrition increases the severity and frequency of infections and middle and low-income countries suffer most in this regard. A study was conducted to analyse the impact and severity of common illnesses such as pneumonia among malnourished children and the results from this study have established that the risk of death increases dramatically in cases of malnourished children (Kiroloset *al.* 2021). This makes it important that the root causes of malnutrition in developing countries are analysed in detail to ensure that its contribution towards child mortality can be minimised effectively.

CONCLUSION

From the foregoing analysis, the study effectively shows that the contribution of malnutrition to child mortality, especially in developing countries is significantly high and necessary actions in this regard need to be taken by the government and private parties. Mostly African and Asian countries were considered low-income and middle-income suffer from phenomenon of malnutrition among children. Such malnourished children are more prone to infections and common illnesses such as diarrhoea, pneumonia and others often become fatal for these children. Since most people from lower and middle-income countries live below the poverty line and lack the necessary education, often do not possess enough knowledge regarding the necessary nutrients that are needed by children for efficient growth. Even with the necessary knowledge regarding the need for nutrients, people lack the financial resources to avail these nutrients. Since most developing nations cannot effectively deal with malnutrition among children, child mortality contributing to malnutrition becomes a quite common phenomenon in such lower-income countries.

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