



## CHILD UNDERNUTRITION PROBLEM AND ITS CONTROL DURING COVID-19 LOCKDOWN

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Received date: 30 November 2021

Revised date: 21 December 2021

Accepted date: 11 January 2022

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### ABSTRACT

Children's undernutrition happens when they don't get enough calories, protein, or micronutrients to stay healthy. Almost a quarter of all children under the age of five are stunted today. In recent decades, India's economic prosperity has coexisted with worrisome levels of chronic hunger and stunting. In the Global Hunger Index 2020, the country was ranked 94th out of 107 countries, well behind many other developing countries. New data suggests that child malnutrition is rising in India, with fewer children dying but more malnourished and anaemic youngsters in several regions. According to recent projections, in addition to the 690 million people who are undernourished in 2019, at least another 83 million, and perhaps as many as 132 million, will be hungry in 2020. An estimated 370 million youngsters will be missing school meals by July 2020. With these additional shocks, children's dietary quantity and quality are expected to deteriorate further, falling below the already precarious situation that existed prior to COVID-19, when only 29% of children aged 6 to 23 months were fed a minimally diverse diet and only 53% were fed the minimum meal frequency.

**KEYWORDS:** Undernutrition, Hungry, Stunting. Covid 19, Pandemic, Lockdown.

### INTRODUCTION

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has impacted health systems in a variety of ways, including labour reductions, supply shortages, demand, and access. Changes in priority of care, isolation, travel restrictions, interruptions in communication among providers or between providers and patients, interruptions in access to medicines and technologies, and economic slowdowns all exacerbate mortality and morbidity, both directly from the outbreak and indirectly from other communicable and preventable diseases.

In the years 2019–2020, the world witnessed the birth of COVID-19, a new Coronavirus Disease that has flipped the world upside down and changed key health determinants. The most serious hazards posed by the COVID-19 problem to children are not those posed by the disease itself, but by its side effects. Inadequate nutrition, which increases the chance of being overweight or underweight, screen addiction, a lack of schooling, mental health consequences, social isolation, the danger of child maltreatment, and decreased vaccination rates and health care are among them.

The COVID-19 epidemic is wreaking havoc on global nutrition, particularly in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). COVID-19's effects in mothers and children may be exacerbated by malnutrition. At the same time, more children are becoming malnourished as the quality of their diets deteriorates, as well as disruptions in nutrition and other important services, as well as the socioeconomic shocks caused by the epidemic in LMICs.

With nearly 8 million total confirmed cases and 119,502 deaths as of October 16, 2020, India is facing a double crisis in responding to COVID-19 amidst ongoing health system challenges. India has the world's second highest burden of COVID-19, with nearly 8 million total confirmed cases and 119,502 deaths. The Indian government has taken many steps to ensure that vital services continue to be provided during the pandemic, but little is known regarding the availability and use of key nutrition intervention programmes during the pandemic.

### What is child Undernutrition?

Child undernutrition occurs when a child's intake of vitamins and minerals is less than what it needs to be for healthy early childhood development. Some of the indicators for deficient child health pertain to growth standards. They include wasting, stunting, and being underweight.

- **Wasting:** Wasting is defined as a low weight-for-height ratio. It's usually an acute condition that comes with a lot of weight loss in a short period of time.
- **Stunting:** Stunting is defined as a low height-for-age ratio. It's caused by chronic or recurring malnutrition.
- **Underweight:** Underweight is defined as a low weight-for-age ratio. Children who are underweight may or may not have stunting and wasting. Underweight is a condition that can typically be addressed, depending on the presence of underlying physical issues.

### Causes of Undernutrition during lockdown and trade restriction

- Disrupting the production, distribution, and sale of nutritious, fresh, and inexpensive foods, forcing millions of families to rely on nutrient-deficient substitutes.
- Overburdened health-care systems as a result of the Covid 19 outbreak.
- Humanitarian response disruptions are diminishing access to critical and frequently life-saving nutrition services.
- Vaccine scarcity and non-availability.
- Poverty.
- Unemployment.
- Unplanned pregnancy during covid 19.
- During the lockdown, there were insufficient MCH services, which increased the risk of low-birth-weight babies.

Because of all of these factors, people are obliged to accept low-quality, low-nutrient diets, resulting in child malnutrition.

### Impact of Undernutrition

- Repeated infections such as diarrhea, acute respiratory infections
- Immunodeficiency.
- Developmental delays.
- Growth stunting.
- Impaired cognitive development.
- Reduced scholastic performance.
- Psychological changes such as depression, anxiety, irritability, apathy, poor sleep and loss of concentration.
- Congenital malformation due to insufficient MCH care.

### Urgent actions to be taken to combat Undernutrition

1. Ensure that nutritious, safe, and inexpensive diets are available to all people.
2. From the start of pregnancy, invest in bettering maternal and child nutrition.
3. Early detection and therapy of childhood malnutrition at the gross root level are essential.
4. Ensure that vulnerable children receive safe and healthy school lunches.
5. Increasing food security among the general public.
6. Women's awareness, particularly on exclusive breastfeeding, should be improved.

### Projects taken up by NITI Aayog, Government of India

#### Covid -19 specific initiatives

- ✓ "Umbare Anganwadi" – Anganwadi at Doorsteps Maintaining Nutrition & Learning continuum at Home
- ✓ Ensuring uninterrupted supply of IFA to prevent anemia
- ✓ CO-BOT: The Technological solution to prevent COVID-19 spread
- ✓ SHG members as Community Warriors during COVID-19 Lockdown
- ✓ POSHAN Van: Healthy Children, Beautiful Nation

#### Ongoing projects

- ✓ PuShTI "Poshan umbrella for Supply chain through Tech Innovation
- ✓ Improving the nutritional quality of meals served under MDM through Food Fortification
- ✓ Harnessing the potential of India's medical colleges to bring maternal nutrition services to scale
- ✓ Promotion of Millets in Tribal areas Odisha Millet Mission (OMM)
- ✓ Dakshata: Developing an enabling environment for service providers for improved maternal and newborn health
- ✓ Introduction of Double Fortified Salt through ICDS in Gujarat
- ✓ Developing model anganwadis as nutri-education centre focusing on ECCE & holistic development of a child
- ✓ "Mo Upakari Bagicha" (My beneficial garden to improve Dietary Diversity)
- ✓ Integrated Human Milk Banking /Comprehensive Lactation Management Centres - Universalizing access to human milk for all babies
- ✓ Introduction of Nutritious Millets into Anganwadi
- ✓ Engaging religious leaders and faith communities to improve maternal and child health outcomes
- ✓ Born Healthy: Strengthening coverage and quality of antenatal care

### CONCLUSION

Today, more vulnerable children are becoming malnourished due to the deteriorating quality of their diets and the multiple shocks created by the pandemic

and its containment measures. Efforts to mitigate the transmission of COVID-19 are disrupting food systems, upending health and nutrition services, devastating livelihoods, and threatening food security. It poses a serious threat to development of county. So, government has to take urgent actions to mitigate the malnourishment problem among children.

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