

MALNUTRITION..... A silent emergency

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Malnutrition is a global public health problem. Humans, like other species, have sensitive window for malnutrition in terms of later outcomes. General malnutrition and specific micronutrient deficiencies contribute to infant, child and maternal morbidity, decreased learning capacity, lower productivity and higher mortality. The World Health Organization define malnutrition as "the cellular imbalance between supply of nutrient and energy and body's demand for them to ensure growth, maintenance and specific functions."^{1,2,5}

According to World Bank report:

- Annually, some 30 million infants, around 82,000 every day are born with intrauterine-growth retardation, due mainly to poor nutritional status.
- 1 in 3 children under five in the developing world are stunted.
- More than 250 million children under five are affected by sub-clinical vitamin A deficiency.
- More than a billion people are at risk of iodine deficiency disorders.
- An estimated 3.5 billion people are affected by iron deficiency anaemia.

The role of nutrition in public health is self-evident; people must live. Both inadequate and excessive food intake lead to health consequences. Because all individuals consume food and therefore, are interested in diet, nutrition is accessible entry point into health education and service intervention.⁴

According to National Nutrition Survey in Pakistan:

In 2001-02 a national level nutrition survey has been conducted by Pakistan Planning Commission and UNICEF. (Published in daily "News" dated Nov. 19, 2003). Results revealed prevalence of underweight 37%, stunting 35.5% and wasting 14.8%. Bio-

chemical results show severe deficiency of iodine among 36.5% mothers. Clinical signs of vitamin A deficiency were present among 9.9% mothers at the time of survey. The Biochemical analysis of the serum retinol show the presence of severe vitamin A deficiency among 0.8% and moderate among 11.7% children.

In respect of anaemia, 45% mothers had iron deficiency anemia. Approximately 16% women are taking iron supplements. Pakistan has one of the highest low birth weight babies ratio in the world 25%.

Regarding breast-feeding, about 85% were aware of the benefits of breast-feeding. However, continuation rate of breast-feeding fell from 96% in the first month to less than 80% at the end of one year.

What to do about Malnutrition?⁶

Comprehensive strategies regarding nutrition intervention are suggested;

- Mobilize community groups and leaders to recognize and demand good nutrition for women and young children in particular.
- Combine fortification and supplementation, including iodized salt, iron/folic acid and vitamin supplements and promote micronutrient rich diets.
- Educate girls and women.
- Improve delivery of nutrition services as a part of MCH Services.
- Improve water and sanitation services.
- Integrate nutrition related activities with PHC network.
- Institutionalize nutrition as discipline by creating proper infrastructure for implementation, monitoring and evaluation of nutrition programme.
- Nutrition surveillance.

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