

Hunger and food insecurity

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' Around the world, more than enough food is produced to feed the global population—but more than 820 million people go hungry each year. After steadily declining for a decade, world hunger is on the rise, affecting 11 percent of people globally. There were an estimated 775 million undernourished people in 2014 - a record low - but that number increased to 820 million in 2018'.(www. actionagainsthunger. org)

' Hunger and food insecurity are great challenges affecting the development of societies. In the United States, one of the wealthiest countries in the world and one of the greatest food production countries in the world, there are an estimated 17. 5 million households experiencing food insecurity, adults and children experience food insecurity and hunger in states all over America'. (Coleman-Jensen et al. 2014).

According to feeding America

' Over 38 million faces poverty in America. In 2019, the majority of households faced with poverty have income less than \$25, 750 annually.

Over 37 million people struggle with hunger in the United States, with over 11 million infants

A household that is food insecure has limited or uncertain access to enough food to support a healthy life. Children are most vulnerable to food insecurity than any other group in the United States.

More than half (56%) of food-insecure households participated in at least one of the major federal food assistance programs — the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly Food Stamps); the National School Lunch Program and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women,

Infants and Children (often called WIC)'

To find the solution to hunger and food insecurity, research has to be conducted to reveal the possible causes and effects.

This thesis will focus on the causes and effects of hunger and food security in the case of the underlying causes of food insecurity and hunger in societies having overpopulation, poverty, drought and conflicts which affect the production and distribution of food.

Food insecurity is the lack of accessibility to nutritious and healthy food mostly due to the financial problems in households. Mostly solution to this problem is not fixed. Hunger is mostly a result of food insecurity and it is the discomfort, weakness and illness caused by prolonged lack of food in the body.

Food insecurity can simply be explained as the low quality of food that one eats or the food which is not appealing due to limited choices. Individuals who face food insecurity issues have different reasons which could be unemployment or low salary from work or a disability which may limit them from earning income. A person's locality can also contribute to food insecurity that is, his or her geographical location can affect his or her ability to get access to food.

For instance most urban areas, rural places, and low-income neighborhoods do not have convenient stores but rather smaller ones instead of full-service supermarkets or grocery stores. As a result of this higher prices, fewer choices, and less healthy food is the end result. And when public

transportation is limited, it can be even harder to get enough healthy meals on the table.

Food insecurity might be seen as hunger but the two are different. Hunger is a physical issue that can be caused by food insecurity. It can lead to illness, weakness, or pain. The concept of hunger covers a spectrum from the short-term physical experience of discomfort to chronic food shortage to severe and life-threatening lack of food.

According to the UN Hunger Report, 'hunger is the term used to define periods when populations are experiencing severe food insecurity'—meaning inability for people to eat for days which may be due to lack of money, lack of access to food, or other resources. Hunger is the distress associated with lack of food. The threshold for food deprivation, or undernourishment, is fewer than 1,800 calories per day.

The Causes of Food Insecurity and Hunger

The causes of hunger and food insecurity includes;

In the United States and other high-income countries, hunger is mainly caused by poverty that results from a lack of job or because jobs pay too little. Hunger rates rise when the national or local economy is in a slump. People lose jobs and cannot find work. Once the economy improves some people continue to struggle to find work. For example, people who have been in prison face wide-scalediscriminationthat makes it difficult for them to find jobs once they reenter their community. In single-parent families, the parent

may not be able to take a job or work enough hours because of no childcare options.

Unstable Markets; people who live on \$1.25 per day spend most of their income on food. Under stable conditions they can scarcely afford enough food to protect themselves and family members against hunger. Any fluctuation that pushes food prices up creates additional hardship. Basic grains such as wheat, rice, and corn make up the largest share of calories among people in developing countries who are hungry.

In 2009, prices of these grains spiked and hunger surged for a short time by an additional 50 to 100 million people. Parents tend to cut back their portions during relatively brief periods of instability. Over a prolonged time they may have to pull children out of school to earn income to pay for food.

Food insecurity and hunger in household is normally caused by financial challenges in the household which may include job redundancy or lay offs at work. Unemployment can also negatively affect a household's food security status. High unemployment rates among low-income populations make it more difficult to meet basic household food needs. In addition, children with unemployed parents have higher rates of food insecurity than children with employed parents. (www. healthypeople. org)

Racial and ethnic disparities exist related to food insecurity. In 2016, black non-Hispanic households were nearly two times more likely to be food insecure than the national average (22.5% versus 12.3%, respectively). Among Hispanic

households, the prevalence of food insecurity was 18.5% compared to the national average (12.3%).

Disabled adults may be at a higher risk for food insecurity due to limited employment opportunities and healthcare-related expenses that reduce the income available to buy food. (www.healthypeople.org) Limited income where households have to decide between paying off bills or buying food or limited monthly income resulting in very low expenditure on food.

Residents are at risk for food insecurity in neighborhoods where transportation options are limited, the travel distance to stores is greater, and there are fewer supermarkets. Lack of access to public transportation or a personal vehicle limits access to food. Groups who may lack transportation to healthy food sources include those with chronic diseases or disabilities, residents of rural areas, and some minority groups.

' A study in Detroit found that people living in low-income predominantly black neighborhoods travel an average of 1.1 miles farther to the closest supermarket than people living in low-income predominantly white neighborhoods.' (www.healthypeople.org)

High dependency and single household heads

Lack of purchasing power or high cost of food stuff. High food prices had become a very big challenge for the poor and also low income earners living in the USA .

The Effects of Food Insecurity and Hunger

Healthy bodies and minds require nutritious meals at every age. But when people do not have enough food or have to choose inexpensive foods with low-nutritional value, it can seriously impact their health. And once the cycle of poor diet and poor health begins, it can be hard to break. The effects of hunger and food insecurity include;

‘ Poor growth and mental development in children. Household food insecurity has insidious effects on the health and development of young children, including increased hospitalizations, poor health, iron deficiency, developmental risk and behavior problems, primarily aggression, anxiety, depression, and attention deficit disorder’ (Cook & Frank, 2008; Whitaker, Phillips, & Orzol, 2006).

These concerns early in life increase children’s risk of poor school readiness, poor school performance and subsequent health disparities and poverty. ‘ Research among school-age children has found associations between household food insecurity and low scores on measures of health, behavioral functioning and academic performance’ (Yoo, & Slack, & Holl, 2009).

‘ Findings related to the association between household food insecurity and children’s growth have been controversial, with some studies showing overweight/obesity and others showing underweight’ (Larson & Story, 2011). Household food insecurity occurs disproportionately among children and families at high risk of obesity, making it difficult to determine causal effects. The lack of clear associations between food insecurity and children’s growth means that it is often invisible. Without asking specifically about food

insecurity, providers are unlikely to recognize children and families who are food insecure. (www. apa. org)

Food insecurity and hunger can lead to chronic health problems. Research shows an association between food insecurity and delayed development in young children; risk of chronic illnesses like asthma and anemia; and behavioral problems like hyperactivity, anxiety and aggression in school-age children.

Complications where households have to choose between paying medical bills or buying food. This poses a huge dilemma for family heads where they have to decide if they have take care of the medical expenses or should spend their limited income on healthy foods for the family.

Extended periods offinancial difficulties. As a result of food insecurity where families have to spend much of their income on food, less is being saved or invested to relieve financial difficulties on families.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Conclusion

Although NGOs like Feeding America, UNICEF, WHO, Action Against Hunger have taken initiative to reduce hunger in the United States, the world's hunger and food insecurity still possess a huge risk to societies because over 37 million people suffer hunger every year in which 11 million are infants. Hunger among infants greatly affects their mental development which can affect theeducationof the younger generation.

Recommendation

With over 38 million people suffering from poverty in the US and huge cost of healthy food items government can subsidise food cost for the poor. Various donations can be made to the NGOs so that they can widen their food supply to infants suffering from hunger and food insecurity.

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