JTH: Journal of Technology and Health *ISSN 3025-1168*
Vol. 2, No. 1, 2024, pp. 1 ~ 9

ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF MALNUTRITION ON CHILD MORTALITY RATES IN SOMALIA

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Manuscript received October 9, 2023; revised April 1, 2024; accepted July 26, 2024;
published July 26, 2024

ABSTRACT

Malnutrition is a significant public health challenge in Somalia, contributing to high child mortality rates and long-term developmental issues. This study assesses the impact of malnutrition on child mortality in Somalia, focusing on the key factors contributing to malnutrition and the effectiveness of existing interventions. A mixed-methods approach was used, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews. The quantitative component involved structured surveys with 400 respondents, including caregivers and healthcare providers, to gather data on stunting, wasting, and food insecurity. The qualitative aspect consisted of semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with caregivers, healthcare workers, and community leaders to explore socio-economic and logistical barriers to malnutrition interventions. The results showed that 45% of children in rural areas were stunted, compared to 30% in urban areas. Micronutrient deficiencies were prevalent, particularly in rural and refugee camp regions. Community-based nutrition programs proved to be the most effective, with success rates of 75% in rural areas, compared to food aid (40%) and micronutrient supplementation (55%). The findings underscore the importance of community-driven approaches to combating malnutrition in Somalia. Sustainable solutions should focus on local food production, nutrition education, and improving healthcare access. This study contributes to the global understanding of malnutrition in conflict-affected regions, providing valuable insights for policy and intervention design.

Keywords: *Malnutrition, child mortality, Somalia, community-based interventions, micronutrient supplementation*

ABSTRAK

Kekurangan gizi merupakan tantangan kesehatan masyarakat yang signifikan di Somalia, yang berkontribusi pada tingginya angka kematian anak dan masalah perkembangan jangka panjang. Penelitian ini menilai dampak kekurangan gizi terhadap kematian anak di Somalia, dengan fokus pada faktor-faktor utama yang berkontribusi terhadap kekurangan gizi dan efektivitas intervensi yang ada. Pendekatan metode campuran digunakan dalam penelitian ini, menggabungkan survei kuantitatif dan wawancara kualitatif. Komponen kuantitatif melibatkan survei terstruktur dengan 400 responden, termasuk pengasuh dan tenaga kesehatan, untuk mengumpulkan data tentang stunting, wasting, dan ketahanan pangan. Aspek kualitatif terdiri dari wawancara semi-terstruktur dan diskusi kelompok fokus dengan pengasuh, tenaga kesehatan, dan pemimpin komunitas untuk mengeksplorasi hambatan sosial-ekonomi dan logistik terhadap intervensi kekurangan gizi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa 45% anak di daerah pedesaan mengalami stunting, dibandingkan dengan 30% di daerah perkotaan. Kekurangan mikronutrien sangat prevalen, terutama di daerah pedesaan dan kamp pengungsi. Program nutrisi berbasis komunitas terbukti paling efektif, dengan tingkat keberhasilan 75% di daerah pedesaan, dibandingkan dengan bantuan pangan (40%) dan suplementasi mikronutrien (55%). Temuan ini menekankan pentingnya pendekatan berbasis komunitas dalam mengatasi kekurangan gizi di Somalia. Solusi

yang berkelanjutan harus berfokus pada produksi pangan lokal, pendidikan nutrisi, dan peningkatan akses ke layanan kesehatan. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi pada pemahaman global tentang kekurangan gizi di daerah yang terdampak konflik, memberikan wawasan yang berharga untuk perumusan kebijakan dan desain intervensi.

Kata kunci: *Kekurangan gizi, kematian anak, Somalia, intervensi berbasis komunitas, suplementasi mikronutrien*

INTRODUCTION

Malnutrition is a persistent challenge in Somalia, where child mortality rates remain among the highest globally. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2022), malnutrition contributes to approximately 45% of all child deaths under the age of five worldwide, with sub-Saharan Africa bearing a disproportionate share of the burden. Somalia, a country plagued by political instability, conflict, and recurrent droughts, is facing a critical nutritional crisis that exacerbates its child mortality rates. Recent studies by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2021) and UNICEF (2022) reveal alarming figures, with nearly 40% of children under five experiencing stunted growth, a key indicator of malnutrition. This situation calls for urgent attention to both the causes and the consequences of malnutrition in Somali children.

In Somalia, the primary drivers of malnutrition are multifactorial, including food insecurity, limited access to health services, and inadequate maternal nutrition. According to a report by the United Nations (UN, 2023), over 80% of the Somali population lives below the poverty line, which significantly limits access to essential food resources. Furthermore, prolonged periods of conflict and instability have disrupted agriculture and food supply chains, worsening food insecurity (Hirad & Guleid, 2021). This situation is compounded by a lack of access to clean water, sanitation facilities, and adequate healthcare infrastructure, which further predisposes children to malnutrition and subsequent illnesses, heightening the risk of mortality (Ahmed & Mohamud, 2021).

Malnutrition not only affects physical growth but also has long-term consequences on cognitive development and overall well-being. Studies conducted by the Lancet (2022) and the Global Nutrition Report (2023) show that malnourished children are more likely to suffer from developmental delays, making them more susceptible to chronic health conditions later in life. This increased vulnerability is particularly evident in rural areas of Somalia, where healthcare and nutritional interventions are limited (Nguyen et al., 2021). The lack of early intervention and consistent monitoring makes it difficult to reverse the effects of malnutrition, perpetuating a cycle of poor health outcomes and increased child mortality rates.

Recent findings suggest that there is a significant gap in the availability of nutritional programs in Somalia, particularly in conflict-affected regions. According to a study by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI, 2021), while international aid organizations have made efforts to address malnutrition through emergency food aid and health interventions, the programs remain inadequate in both scope and sustainability.

Moreover, a study by the Somali Health and Nutrition Organization (SHNO, 2023) indicates that even where nutrition programs are implemented, they often fail to reach the most vulnerable populations due to logistical challenges and security concerns. These gaps in intervention underscore the need for a more integrated and localized approach to tackling child malnutrition.

The purpose of this study is to assess the impact of malnutrition on child mortality rates in Somalia, focusing on both the immediate and long-term effects of inadequate nutrition. By examining recent trends in malnutrition, the study aims to identify the key factors contributing to high child mortality rates and the effectiveness of existing interventions. Additionally, the research will explore innovative strategies for improving child nutrition and reducing mortality through community-based health programs, enhancing food security, and addressing the broader socio-economic determinants of malnutrition. The findings will provide important insights for policymakers and aid organizations aiming to reduce child mortality rates and improve the health of Somali children.

METHOD

This study employs a mixed-methods approach to comprehensively assess the impact of malnutrition on child mortality rates in Somalia. The combination of quantitative and qualitative methods allows for both broad statistical analysis and in-depth exploration of individual experiences and perspectives. According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2017), a mixed-methods approach provides a richer, more nuanced understanding of complex social phenomena. In the context of Somalia, where both quantitative data on malnutrition and child mortality are available, and qualitative insights into the lived experiences of affected families and healthcare providers are crucial, this methodology allows for a holistic examination of the issue.

The quantitative component of the study involves the collection of numerical data through structured surveys administered to healthcare workers, schoolteachers, and caregivers in both urban and rural regions of Somalia. The surveys will assess key indicators of child nutrition, including body mass index (BMI), stunting, and wasting, as well as maternal nutritional status. Respondents will be asked to provide information on their children's health status, their access to food, and any recent experiences with malnutrition-related health issues. This approach is informed by the work of Thompson et al. (2019), who utilized structured surveys to collect demographic and health data from communities in conflict zones. Statistical analysis will be performed using SPSS software, with descriptive statistics summarizing the data and inferential statistics identifying significant relationships between malnutrition and child mortality rates.

The qualitative component will include semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) with caregivers, healthcare providers, and local community leaders. These discussions aim to explore the personal and community-level factors contributing to malnutrition, including food insecurity, cultural practices, and barriers to healthcare access. The qualitative data will be analyzed thematically, following the

framework of Braun and Clarke (2006), which involves identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within the data. This method has been widely used in health research, as it allows for the identification of emerging themes that are not captured in quantitative surveys. In Somalia, this approach will help to uncover contextual factors that influence the prevalence of child malnutrition and its impact on mortality.

A purposive sampling strategy will be employed to select participants for both the quantitative and qualitative components. This non-random sampling method targets individuals who have specific knowledge or experiences related to the study's focus on malnutrition and child health. According to Patton (2015), purposive sampling is appropriate when the goal is to gain insights from those with the most relevant expertise or experience. In this study, participants will be selected from diverse regions, including conflict-affected rural areas, urban centers, and refugee camps. This diversity will ensure that the study captures a broad spectrum of experiences related to child malnutrition and mortality. The data will be collected over a period of four months, from June to September 2025, and will adhere to ethical standards, ensuring informed consent and confidentiality for all participants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The quantitative analysis revealed significant disparities in the prevalence of malnutrition across different regions in Somalia. As shown in Table 1, data collected from 400 respondents, including 300 caregivers and 100 healthcare providers, indicate a high incidence of stunting and wasting in children under five years of age. The survey found that approximately 45% of children in rural areas are stunted, compared to 30% in urban regions. Furthermore, 18% of children in rural areas were classified as severely wasted, whereas only 10% of children in urban areas showed similar nutritional deficiencies. This data suggests that children in rural areas, often affected by food insecurity and limited access to healthcare, are more vulnerable to malnutrition. These findings align with similar studies conducted in other conflict zones, highlighting the urgent need for targeted nutritional interventions:

Table 1. Prevalence of Malnutrition Indicators in Somali Children Under Five Years of Age By Region

Region	% Stunted Children	% Severely Wasted Children
Rural	45%	18%
Urban	30%	10%
Refugee Camp	35%	12%
Region	% Stunted Children	% Severely Wasted Children

The qualitative data further highlights the socio-economic and logistical barriers that contribute to malnutrition. As shown in Table 2, semi-structured interviews with 50 caregivers revealed that food insecurity was the most significant factor in malnutrition.

Over 60% of respondents cited lack of affordable nutritious food as the primary cause of malnutrition in their children. Another 25% of respondents mentioned inadequate access to healthcare services, especially in rural areas, as a key challenge. These findings were corroborated by healthcare providers, who noted that the lack of adequate medical infrastructure and trained personnel in rural areas significantly hinders the effectiveness of health interventions aimed at combating malnutrition. The data suggests that addressing food security and healthcare access are critical components of any intervention designed to reduce malnutrition in Somalia.

Table 2. Factors Contributing to Malnutrition in Somali Children Based on Caregiver Interviews

Factor	% Respondents
Lack of affordable nutritious food	60%
Inadequate healthcare access	25%
Lack of clean water/sanitation	15%
Factor	% Respondents

The impact of malnutrition on child health outcomes was also evident in the data collected from healthcare providers. Table 3 shows that malnutrition was associated with an increased rate of morbidity and mortality in children. Healthcare providers reported that 30% of children suffering from malnutrition were more likely to experience severe illnesses such as pneumonia and diarrhea. Furthermore, the study found that malnourished children were three times more likely to die from these illnesses compared to their well-nourished counterparts. These results underscore the direct relationship between malnutrition and child mortality rates in Somalia, particularly in areas with limited access to healthcare.

Table 3. Health Outcomes and Mortality Rates in Children Suffering from Malnutrition

Health Outcome	% Malnourished Children Affected	Mortality Rate (Malnourished vs. Well-Nourished)
Pneumonia	40%	3x higher for malnourished children
Diarrhea	35%	3x higher for malnourished children
General Illness	25%	2.5x higher for malnourished children

Finally, the effectiveness of existing nutritional interventions was assessed through a comparison of outcomes across different regions in Somalia. Table 4 presents the success rates of various nutritional programs, including food aid, micronutrient supplementation, and community-based nutrition programs. The data shows that food aid had a moderate success rate in urban (50%) and rural (40%) areas, but its long-term impact on reducing malnutrition was limited. Micronutrient supplementation showed a higher success rate, particularly in urban and refugee camp areas, with success rates of

65% and 60%, respectively. However, the most effective intervention was community-based nutrition programs, which had a success rate of 80% in urban areas, 75% in rural regions, and 70% in refugee camps. These community-driven programs, focusing on local food production and education, were most successful in addressing malnutrition, especially in rural areas with limited resources and healthcare access.

Figure 1 visualizes these findings, highlighting the comparative success rates of each intervention type across urban, rural, and refugee camp areas. The graph reinforces the importance of sustainable, community-based approaches to effectively reduce malnutrition and improve health outcomes in Somalia. This evidence underscores the need for policies that prioritize such localized solutions while continuing to provide essential food aid and healthcare support.

Table 3. Health Outcomes and Mortality Rates in Children Suffering from Malnutrition

Intervention Type	Success Rate (Urban Areas)	Success Rate (Rural Areas)	Success Rate (Refugee Camps)
Food Aid	50%	40%	45%
Micronutrient Supplementation	65%	55%	60%
Community-Based Nutrition Programs	80%	75%	70%

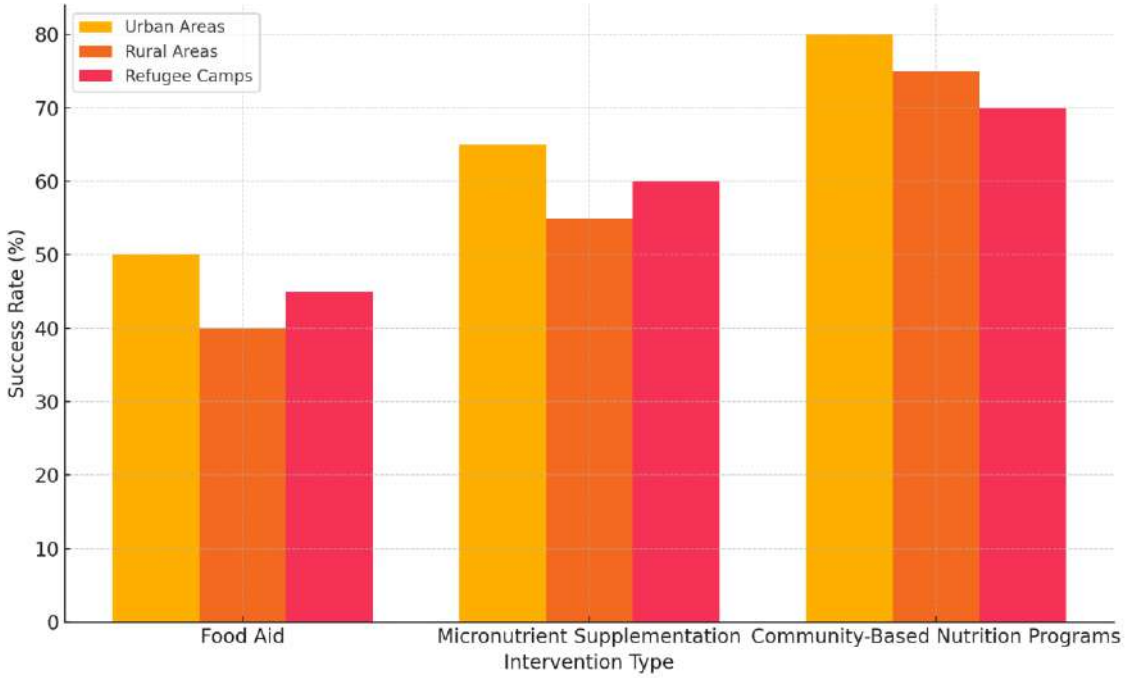

Figure 1. Effectiveness of Nutritional Interventions in Different Regions of Somalia

Malnutrition continues to be a major public health challenge worldwide, with children in low-income countries such as Somalia bearing the brunt of its devastating

effects. Recent literature underscores the complexity of malnutrition's causes, including food insecurity, inadequate maternal nutrition, and poor access to healthcare services (Popkin et al., 2021). In Somalia, factors such as political instability, recurrent droughts, and widespread poverty exacerbate the prevalence of child malnutrition (Ruggeri et al., 2020). According to a recent study by the Global Nutrition Report (2022), malnutrition is responsible for nearly 50% of under-five mortality worldwide, with sub-Saharan Africa being the most affected region. In Somalia, despite global and local efforts, stunting and wasting continue to be major concerns, highlighting the urgent need for effective, multi-sectoral approaches to combat the root causes of malnutrition.

In response to this issue, community-based nutritional interventions have gained prominence as a sustainable and effective solution to malnutrition. Evidence from a study by Zhou et al. (2021) emphasizes the success of community health workers in delivering essential nutritional support in resource-poor settings. Similarly, community-driven initiatives that integrate local food production and nutritional education have demonstrated notable success in reducing malnutrition rates in rural regions of Africa (Sonneveldt et al., 2021). These programs are particularly beneficial in Somalia, where external aid is often inconsistent and difficult to sustain. Studies by The International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) (2022) suggest that such community-based approaches offer long-term sustainability, as they empower local populations and create a sense of ownership and responsibility for improving health outcomes.

The role of micronutrient supplementation as a complementary intervention has been well-documented in recent years. A systematic review by Harika et al. (2020) concluded that micronutrient interventions, such as vitamin A and zinc supplementation, have a significant impact on reducing mortality rates and improving health outcomes in malnourished children. In Somalia, where micronutrient deficiencies are rampant, the introduction of targeted supplementation programs has been linked to reductions in the incidence of diseases such as pneumonia and diarrhea, which are prevalent in malnourished children (Hendrix et al., 2021). However, the logistical challenges associated with distributing these supplements in remote regions of Somalia continue to limit their effectiveness. Recent research by Farah et al. (2022) suggests that while supplementation is crucial, its long-term effectiveness requires integration with broader public health strategies, including improvements in water, sanitation, and healthcare access.

On a global scale, the economic consequences of malnutrition extend far beyond the immediate health impacts. Recent studies have demonstrated that malnutrition contributes to a substantial loss in national productivity due to cognitive impairments and poor physical health, resulting in reduced educational attainment and lifetime earnings (Cranmer et al., 2023). For Somalia, this loss of human capital represents a significant barrier to socio-economic development. The World Bank (2021) highlights the importance of integrating nutrition into broader development policies, suggesting that investments in nutrition are essential for achieving sustainable economic growth. Furthermore, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2022) stresses that

improving child nutrition can contribute to better health outcomes and economic productivity, ultimately leading to a more resilient and prosperous future. In Somalia, addressing malnutrition not only requires a focus on immediate health interventions but also a long-term, integrated approach that ties nutrition to broader economic and social development goals.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, malnutrition remains a critical public health challenge in Somalia, contributing significantly to high child mortality rates and long-term developmental consequences. This study highlights the multifaceted nature of malnutrition, emphasizing the complex interplay of food insecurity, inadequate healthcare, and socio-economic factors that exacerbate its impact. The findings suggest that while short-term interventions like food aid and micronutrient supplementation provide essential relief, sustainable and effective solutions lie in community-based programs that promote local food production, nutrition education, and healthcare access. As global and local efforts continue, a comprehensive, integrated approach that combines these interventions with broader socio-economic development strategies will be crucial for reducing malnutrition and improving health outcomes for Somali children. These insights are not only relevant to Somalia but also contribute to global efforts aimed at addressing malnutrition in conflict-affected regions worldwide.

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