

Session-7 (December 2, 2021), Paper-1:

Abstract

Title: Trends and Inequality of Childhood Undernutrition in Bangladesh: A household level analysis (2004-2018)

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Background: Undernutrition is one of the major public health concerns in Bangladesh. This study examined the trends and patterns of childhood undernutrition, inequality, and its socioeconomic contributors in Bangladesh.

Methods: Data were extracted from the Bangladesh Demographic Health Survey (BDHS), which is a nationally representative cross-sectional survey. We used the last five rounds of BDHS (2004, 2007, 2011, 2014 and 2017-18) for measuring child undernutrition equity and conducting decomposition analysis. A regression-based decomposition method was applied to assess the socioeconomic contributors of inequality.

Results: We observed that the prevalence of childhood undernutrition has declined from 2004 to 2018 in Bangladesh. The prevalence of stunting and wasting has declined from 51% (2004) to 31% (2018) and 15% (2004) to 8.38% (2018), respectively. Similarly, the decreasing trends of childhood underweight were also observed from 2004 (42%) to 2018 (22%). We also found that the prevalence of undernutrition is higher among the children of mothers who had lower education, lived in rural areas, and were from the poorest wealth quintile. The overall change in stunting prevalence over the 15-year periods was about 39%, while the prevalence of stunting declined at a rate of 3.26% per annum. The overall change in wasting prevalence over the 15-year periods was about 43%, while the prevalence of stunting declined at a rate of 3.64% per annum. The annual decline in the prevalence of childhood underweight was 49% while the prevalence declined at a rate of 4.38% per annum. Although the prevalence of childhood undernutrition has declined during the period 2004 to 2018, the rate of undernutrition is higher among the children of mothers who had lower education, live in rural areas, and are from the poorest wealth quintile. Wealth status accounted for almost half of the total inequality in the prevalence of both stunting and underweight among children, whereas maternal education was ranked second among the contributors. Maternal education and BMI status of mothers are highest contributor for childhood wasting.

Conclusions: Findings of the study indicate that undernutrition inequalities in terms of socioeconomic aspects appear to have widened over time. Improving economic activity and maternal education will improve the nutritional status of children and as a consequence reduce inequality. Therefore, investments in education, creation of working opportunities, and empowerment of vulnerable and disadvantaged people along with nutrition-specific interventions will be important measures to eliminate this inequality at the population level.

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