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## FOOD INSECURITY IN THE FACE OF INCREASING FOOD PRICES

Aditi Munmun Sengupta\*<sup>1</sup>, Amit Kumar Sengupta<sup>2</sup>, Archana Majumdar<sup>3</sup>, Dilip Ghosh<sup>4</sup>, Naveen Tauro<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>\*Academy of Family Physicians of India, Harvard Medical School Post Graduate Association Member, India.

<sup>2</sup>Department of Finance and Research and Development, Exide Industries Limited India, West Bengal, India.

<sup>3</sup>Member of National Commission for Women, Independent Director, Moil Limited, Ministry of Steel, Government of India, New Delhi, India.

<sup>4</sup>Ex member of Legislative Assembly, Government of India, Member of Standing Committee of Home-Affairs, India.

<sup>5</sup>Clergyman, Calcutta Archdiocese, Kolkata, West Bengal, India.

### ABSTRACT

In recent months, the issue of food insecurity has become increasingly pressing as global food prices continue to rise sharply. This surge in prices has dire implications for millions of individuals and families who are already struggling to meet their basic nutritional needs. Food insecurity, characterized by limited or uncertain access to adequate food, poses significant health risks and challenges to communities, particularly among vulnerable populations. The rise in food prices can be attributed to a combination of factors, including supply chain disruptions, climate change and geopolitical tensions which have led to significant hikes in the cost of staple foods, leaving vulnerable populations to make difficult decisions between purchasing food and addressing other essential needs. As a result, masses are forced to rely on less nutritious options, which can lead to long-term health consequences.

### KEYWORDS

Global food prices, Food insecurity and Food prices.

### Author for Correspondence:

Aditi Munmun Sengupta,  
Academy of Family Physicians of India,  
Harvard Medical School Post Graduate Association  
Member, Kolkata, West Bengal, India.

**Email:** [sengupta2aditi@gmail.com](mailto:sengupta2aditi@gmail.com)

### INTRODUCTION

#### Background

Both local and global food systems are under tremendous stress. Food prices are at all-time highs and vulnerable groups are still being impacted by inflation. In comparison to pre-pandemic levels, food costs have increased by more than 25% worldwide, with rice, wheat, and cooking oil being the most affected, according to the FAO Food Price Index (2024)<sup>1,2,3</sup>.

According to recent studies, the number of food-insecure households has escalated, with mothers and children often bearing the brunt of this crisis. The implications extend beyond mere hunger; food insecurity is associated with a higher prevalence of chronic health conditions, increased healthcare costs, and diminished academic performance in children<sup>4,5</sup>. Low-income households that spend more than 60% of their income on food are disproportionately affected by food inflation in low-income countries (World Bank, 2023)<sup>6</sup>. Food instability and undernutrition have alarmingly increased as a result. The Philippines was classified as having "serious hunger" by the 2023 Global Hunger Index, with over 26% of children under five experiencing stunting and over 10% experiencing wasting<sup>7</sup>.

The effects of growing food prices are becoming more and more apparent to students, especially those enrolled in public colleges and basic education programs. Due to low family income, many pupils either skip meals entirely or arrive at school without enough food<sup>8</sup>. A 2022 Department of Education poll found that over one in four kids said they went to school hungry and school-based feeding programs have had trouble keeping up with demand because of growing food procurement prices. This problem impacts not just diet and health but also attendance, focus, and academic achievement<sup>9</sup>.

Working students and low-income scholars at postsecondary institutions are similarly impacted by the necessity of allocating their diminishing funds for accommodation, tuition, and transportation, leaving little for wholesome meals<sup>10</sup>. The youth's learning results, mental health, and physical development would all suffer if this hidden hunger is not addressed and it may even worsen poverty cycles<sup>6,10</sup>.

## **CASE STUDIES**

Critical Insights into Food insecurity through various global case studies reveal the multifaceted nature of food shortages and highlight the urgent need for comprehensive solutions.

Understanding the historical context of food insecurity is crucial for addressing current challenges. Over time food systems have evolved

significantly, marked by key historical events, that have contributed to today's food access disparities.

### **Case Study 1: Sub-Saharan Africa<sup>11</sup>**

#### **Overview of food Insecurity**

Sub-Saharan Africa faces extensive food insecurity driven by climate change, conflict and inadequate infrastructure, leading to significant malnutrition rates among vulnerable populations.

#### **Key Statistics**

Approximately 250 million people are classified as food insecure in Sub-Saharan Africa, with children and women being the most affected demographics, indicative of a broader systemic failure.

#### **Local Initiatives and Challenges**

Various local initiatives, including community gardens and food banks, aim to mitigate food insecurity, but face challenges such as funding and political instability, which hinder sustainable progress.

Sub-Saharan Africa is a region plagued by a multifaceted food insecurity crisis. With mounting pressures from climate change and human conflict, the statistics reveal a staggering number of individuals suffering from food shortages. Despite certain local initiatives aimed at combatting these issues, systemic challenges continue to obstruct meaningful progress.

### **Case Study 2: South Asia<sup>12</sup>**

#### **Food insecurity in India and Bangladesh**

The region grapples with food insecurity, primarily due to population pressures, agricultural inefficiencies and socio-political issues.

#### **Government policies**

Policies aimed at food distribution and agricultural support can often create disparities, which affect vulnerable populations disproportionately.

#### **NGO Interventions**

Numerous NGOs work in South Asia to address food insecurity through innovative approaches, but face recurring challenges such as political and economic barriers.

In South Asia, food insecurity significantly affects population health and economic development. As we examine the complex interplay of government policies and NGO efforts, it becomes evident that while initiatives exist to counter food issues

continuous barriers must be addressed to ensure equitable food access for all.

### **Case Study 3: Latin America<sup>13</sup>**

#### **Food access issues in Venezuela**

The Venezuelan crisis has resulted in drastic food shortages and widespread malnutrition, illustrating a breakdown in food systems and governance.

#### **Economic Factors**

Hyperinflation and economic mismanagement have eroded purchasing power, severely limiting access to food for the average citizen.

#### **Community responses**

Communities are rallying to establish food co-operatives and urban gardens as grassroots solutions to combat food shortages and improve nutrition.

Latin America, particularly Venezuela, showcases the stark relationship between political instability and food access. The economic downturn has led to a humanitarian crisis, where innovative community-led responses emerge as lifelines. Exploring these dynamics offers critical insights into the intersection of governance and food security.

### **Case Study 4: Middle East<sup>1</sup>**

#### **Impact of conflict on food security**

Ongoing conflicts in the Middle East disrupt food production and supply chains, creating acute food insecurity conditions.

#### **Refugee crises**

The influx of refugees exacerbates food insecurity in hosting countries, leading to strain on resources and increased competition for limited food supplies.

#### **International aid efforts**

International organizations are mobilizing resources to provide food assistance, but access remains hindered by geopolitical tensions and logistics challenges.

In the Middle East, the dire consequences of conflict on food security are evident. With millions displaced by violence, access to food has become increasingly precarious, challenging both host countries and aid organizations. By examining international responses, we can evaluate the efficacy of humanitarian aid in providing relief in such tumultuous contexts.

### **Syrian Refugee situation: Context and challenges<sup>15</sup>**

#### **Overview of the Syrian conflict**

The Syrian conflict, which began in 2011, has resulted in widespread destruction and displacement. As a compounded effect, this conflict has rendered large swathes of the country unable to support their populations basic needs, particularly for food.

#### **Refugee statistics**

More than 5 million Syrians have fled their country seeking refuge in neighboring nations and beyond. Many live in precarious conditions, relying on humanitarian efforts to procure food and essential supplies, underscoring the urgency of a collaborative response.

#### **Food access challenges**

Refugees often encounter significant barriers to accessing food due to lack of financial resources, legal status issues and challenges within host countries systems. This multifaceted environment demands innovative and sustained intervention strategies to address food access.

This section contextualizes the plight of Syrian refugees by examining the conflict's background, presenting crucial statistics that highlight the scale of displacement and addressing the multifaceted challenges these displaced populations face in terms of food access.

### **Current statistics: The extent of food insecurity<sup>16</sup>**

#### **Widespread food insecurity**

As of the latest assessments, an alarming percentage of Yemen's population, often cited as around 80%, are in need of some form of humanitarian assistance due to food insecurity.

#### **Affected demographics**

Particularly Vulnerable groups include children under five, pregnant women and the elderly who suffer disproportionately from malnutrition and its consequences.

#### **Regional Disparities**

Food insecurity is not evenly distributed throughout Yemen; certain geographic areas face dire conditions due to localized conflicts, access limitations and economic marginalization.

Recent studies reveal that unprecedented rates of food insecurity plague Yemen, with projections indicating that up to 80% of the population are in

dire need of assistance. The most Vulnerable among them are young children and women, who face chronic malnutrition and health complications. Furthermore, not all regions are equally affected; various parts of Yemen experience stark contrasts in availability and access to food, pointing to the need for targeted interventions that acknowledge these disparities.

### **FUTURE CHALLENGES**

Four interconnected challenges can be used to classify this complex crisis: Budgetary Restrictions (B): Low earnings, job uncertainty, and inflation are reducing household purchasing power.

Geographic, logistical and supply chain challenges limit physical access to wholesome, varied food, particularly in rural and conflict-affected areas (A). The costs of basic commodities have become unaffordable for many due to supply manipulation, profiteering, and a lack of market control.

Nutritional Deficiency (N): Malnutrition, anaemia and long-term health consequences, particularly for women and children, result from a reliance on inexpensive, low-nutrient foods.

Coordinated policy, research and community-based interventions are necessary to address the linked issues listed above<sup>17</sup>.



**Figure No.1: Sub-Saharan Africa (Steve Mckenzie on Unsplash)**



**Figure No.2: South Asia (Shibin K On Unsplash)**



Figure No.3: Middle East (Peter F On Unsplash)

## CONCLUSION

The urgency of the situation cannot be overstated. Tackling food insecurity not only addresses the immediate need for nutrition but also promotes overall community health and resilience. As the cost of food continues to climb, the need for comprehensive strategies to support those affected and ensure access to nutritious food has never been more critical.

Immediate action is needed to address the growing crisis of food insecurity in the context of rising food prices. Policymakers, community organizations and individuals must work collaboratively to mitigate these effects. Solutions may include enhancing food assistance programs, investing in local agriculture and implementing measures to stabilize food prices.

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## CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

There are no conflicts of interest.

## ETHICAL DECLARATION

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