

Household food insecurity- a major public health problem

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Household food insecurity is the inability to provide enough food for a healthy and active life household style for all members and is a major public health problem in all the developing countries including Pakistan, and even in many of the developed countries. It has insidious effects on the health and development of young children including increased hospitalization, poor health, iron deficiency, developmental risk and behavior problems, primarily protein energy malnutrition, aggression, anxiety, depression, attention deficient disorder.¹ Food security is especially important for children, as they have more stomach aches, frequent headaches and colds, than children who are in food-secure households. There is higher rated of hospitalization.²

Food insecurity is increasing in the world where 925 million people are undernourished. Out of them, about 900 million people are living in developing countries. More than 70% of these people live in rural areas, as reported in a study in this issue of the *Journal*.³ Despite the fact that Pakistan is one of the largest producers of many agricultural commodities of the world and having the status of food self sufficiency, 26% of the population is undernourished.⁴

Malnutrition or malnourishment is a condition that results from eating a diet in which nutrients are either not enough or are too much that the diet causes health problems.⁵ It is often used specifically to refer to undernutrition, where there is not enough calories, protein, or micronutrients.⁶

If under nutrition occurs before 2 years of age, it may result in permanent problems with physical and mental development of children.⁷ Under nourishment is most often due to not enough high quality food being available to eat. This is often related to high food prices and poverty. There are two main types of undernutrition Protein Energy Malnutrition (PEM) and dietary deficiencies. There are millions undernourished

people in the world (13% of the total population).⁸ In 2013, PEM was estimated to have resulted in 469,000 deaths in the world.⁹

Ensuring food security should be a national priority, particularly for young children, because it is adversely associated not only with their current health and well being but also with their future health. Investing in children health and well being early in life sets them on a positive trajectory towards future success.

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