

FOOD INSECURITY IN CHILDREN AGED 6 TO 59 MONTHS WITH ACUTE MALNUTRITION. CALI - COLOMBIA 2022

INTRODUCTION:

Malnutrition is a universal problem, affecting all countries in the world with one or more forms of malnutrition, posing one of the greatest global challenges. In Colombia, by the year 2022, malnutrition in children under 5 years of age increased by 18.9%, with a total of 20,336 reported cases. In Valle del Cauca, the third-largest department in Colombia, 432 cases of acute malnutrition were reported in the same year, reaching a prevalence of 0.30% per 100 children under five years old.

Food insecurity has been extensively studied, but the specific food insecurity in children with acute malnutrition remains unknown, which is crucial as it supports immediate actions. Identifying the access and consumption of food in this population will help guide actions and allocate resources for the development of strategies, programs, or public policies that can positively impact the health of this group in terms of recurrence and mortality.

METHODOLOGY:

The study is an observational descriptive cross-sectional study. The target population was children with acute, moderate, and severe malnutrition in Valle del Cauca, a department located in the Southwest of Colombia with an approximate population of 2 million, where 7.2% are children under 5 years old.

The study included children reported during 2022 to the national epidemiological surveillance system (SIVIGILA) with weight-for-height indicator below -2 standard deviations or phenotypes of severe malnutrition. Children with chronic illnesses explaining malnutrition were excluded.

One week after notifying the case to the surveillance system, a telephone contact was made with the caregiver. The family's and child's food security was assessed through the Latin American and Caribbean Food Security Scale (ELCSA), which contains 14 questions related to food quality, quantity, hunger, and concerns. Additionally, sociodemographic, clinical, and consumption habits were evaluated.

The study was approved by the research and ethics committee of the National School of Sports and the research committee of the Departmental Health Secretary.

RESULTS:

Seventy children reported to SIVIGILA were evaluated; 48.5% were between 1 and 2 years old, 52.8% were female, 14.2% belonged to specific ethnic groups such as Afro-Colombians or indigenous, 88.5% belonged to low socioeconomic status, and 2.8% had another nationality. 21.3% of mothers had higher education, 47% of households had more than 4 people, and 28.5% of households had another child under five years old (Table 1).

Regarding clinical characteristics, 75.7% of children had moderate acute malnutrition, 17% had simultaneous chronic malnutrition, and 4.2% had edema.

Regarding food insecurity, it was found that 58.6% of households with malnourished children experienced food insecurity, but 56% of these households had mild food insecurity.

CONCLUSIONS:

This research reveals that not all children with acute malnutrition suffer from food insecurity, and the proportion of children suffering from hunger is very low. Therefore, it is necessary to explore other possible biological and social causes related to feeding practices or parenting patterns that may explain this occurrence.

It is essential for the country to understand that not all children with malnutrition require complementary feeding programs or social assistance. To efficiently guide social programs, it is necessary to evaluate food access, quality in terms of diversity, and determine the need for these benefits.