

A secondary data analysis of food security indicators in households affected by a double burden of malnutrition in Saharawi refugee camps in southwest Algeria

Introduction

Stunting and obesity are known to coexist within the household in a variety of contexts. Stunting in childhood is associated with overweight and nutrition-related non-communicable diseases in adulthood. Furthermore, the simultaneous presence of seemingly opposite malnutrition types makes it difficult to programme comprehensive nutrition interventions in resource poor settings. This difficulty is often greater in humanitarian contexts. The study aimed to assess whether household food security indicators are different in households affected by this double burden of malnutrition compared to unaffected households among Saharawi people living in refugee camps in the southwest of Algeria.

Methods

We performed a secondary data analysis of a cross-sectional stratified cluster nutrition survey, implemented in four Saharawi refugee camps in 2010. The survey collected data from 2,040 households that included 1,759 children and 2,734 women. Of these, 651 households that had data on at least one child and one woman were included in this analysis. Households were classified as Double burden, Stunted only, Overweight only, and Normal, according to the presence of stunted children and women with abdominal obesity.

We estimated an age-specific Infant and Child Feeding Index (ICFI) to assess dietary adequacy in children aged 6-59 months. Household food security and diversity was defined by the Food Consumption Score (FCS) and the average number of food groups consumed in a week, respectively. Age, women's height and number of children per household were also analysed.

Results

We observed that 48.9%, 25.6%, 9.8%, and 15.7% of households were classified as overweight only, double burden, stunted only and normal, respectively. Table 1 summarises the differences found in FCS and ICFI categories across households. We did not find differences in FCS nor in the average number of food groups consumed among the different types of households. A higher proportion of households whose children presented a poor ICFI was found in households defined as stunted. In double burden households, women's age, children's age and the number of children were greater than in other categories.

Conclusions

Indicators of food security and dietary diversity are not different between households affected by different types of malnutrition. Our findings suggest there is limited value in using food security indicators alone to guide nutritional interventions in humanitarian contexts where the double burden of malnutrition is highly prevalent. A more comprehensive approach to understand the dynamics of food security and dietary adequacy need to be explored to develop nutritional strategies in humanitarian contexts where different types of malnutrition coexist.

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