

# Malnutrition among the Children of Unorganised Workers

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**Abstract:** *Malnutrition is a major problem in our country, where more than 46% of children below 5 years are suffering from under nutrition. There are many causes for the malnutrition including social, economic, cultural and health related issues. Globally, childhood malnutrition is the underlying cause of death in an estimated 35% of all deaths among children under the age of five years. Maternal and child under-nutrition account for 11% of the global burden of the diseases. The UN ranks India in the bottom quartile of countries by under-1 infant mortality (the 53rd highest), and under-5 child mortality (78 deaths per 100 live births). In this paper we would focus on the occupation of the parents of malnourished children. In our country more than 95% of the people are engaged in the unorganised sector. Occupation of the parents has an impact on the Nutrition status of both women and children. The study indicates the association between malnutrition among children and the unorganised nature of work that the parents undertake.*

**Key Words:** *Malnutrition, Occupation, Unorganised workers.*

## 1. Introduction

Malnutrition is one of the most concerning health and development issue in India as in other parts of the world. Childhood under nutrition is an important public health and development challenge in India. Undernourished children have significantly higher risk of mortality and morbidity. Besides increasing the risk of death and diseases, under nutrition also leads to growth retardation and impaired psychosocial and cognitive development. Malnutrition in early childhood has serious long-term consequences because it impedes motor, sensory, cognitive, social and emotional development of the child. Malnourished children are less likely to perform well in school and more likely to grow into malnourished adults, and at a greater risk of disease, and early death.

As per World Health Organization (WHO) standards, birth weight of an infant less than 2500 grams is considered as low birth weight infants.

This is an indicator of malnutrition in mothers. Malnutrition in children is not affected by food intake alone. It is also influenced by access to health services, quality of care for the antenatal health of the pregnant mother and the following of good hygiene practices. It also includes the occupation and economical status of the Parents.

Approximately 95% of India's 460 million strong Labour force are categorised as 'unorganised sector' workers (Informal sector). The unorganized sector on the other hand, is characterized by seasonal and temporary nature of occupations, high labour mobility, dispersed functioning of operations, casualization of labour, lack of organizational support, low bargaining power, all of which make it vulnerable to socio-economic hardships. In the rural areas it comprises of landless agricultural labourers, small and marginal farmers, fishing, horticulture, bee-keeping, toddy tapping, forest workers, rural artisans, etc. where as in the urban areas, it comprises mainly of manual labourers in construction, carpentry, transport as well as street vendors, hawkers, head load workers, cobblers, garment factories casual workers.

## 2. Research Design and Data Collection

Research design is Descriptive as the paper looks at the nature of employment of parents and the nutrition status of children. It was decided to collect the data from Bellary District from Karnataka, a southern state of India. Data was collected from the families of the malnourished children, it was further limited to 100 home deliveries while collecting data. The researcher gathered 102 respondents during the time of survey. Purposive sampling was used in collecting data.

## 3. Results

It is noticed that among 102 malnourished children, 34 % of them are severely malnourished and 66% of them are moderately malnourished as per the WHO growth chart. The 53% of the children are female babies and 47% of them are male babies.

There are several different levels of severity of acute malnutrition. They are (1) Moderate acute malnutrition (MAM) and (2) Severe acute malnutrition (SAM)<sup>1</sup>. Severe acute malnutrition is a result of recent (short-term) deficiency of protein, energy, minerals and vitamins leading to loss of body fats and muscle tissues. Acute malnutrition presents with wasting (low weight-for-height) and the presence of oedema (i.e., retention of water in body tissues). ‘Chronic malnutrition’, also known as ‘stunting’ is a form of growth failure which develops over a long period of time. Inadequate nutrition over long periods of time (including poor maternal nutrition and poor infant and young child feeding practices) and repeated infections can lead to stunting. In children, it can be measured using the height-for-age nutritional index. An individual will thus experience malnutrition if the appropriate amount of or quality of nutrients comprising for a healthy diet is not consumed for an extended period of time.

A large body of evidence from scientific research implicates impact of nutrition on various aspects of physical, brain, cognitive, social and productivity of individuals including impact on wellness of the future generations. In young children, the outcomes are inadequate diet are:

- Poor growth
- Poor cognition
- Poor muscle development
- Reduced work capacity
- Poor social development
- High rates of illness
- Difficulty in school

*Critical periods of development*-early years are of paramount importance for later physical, mental and social development. In fact, neuroscience has established the synergy of integrating nutrition stimulation for growth and achieving a child’s full potential in a holistic manner<sup>2</sup>. Many child development programs have integrated health and nutrition services, early intervention with varying success. In a study in India, Angawadi children particularly girls showed better performance on various cognitive dimensions of conceptual skills, information, comprehension, visual perception, memory and object vocabulary compared to home based children.

The age group of the children are 31% between 1 to 2 years 39 % of them between 2 to 3 years and 30% of them between 3 to 5 years.

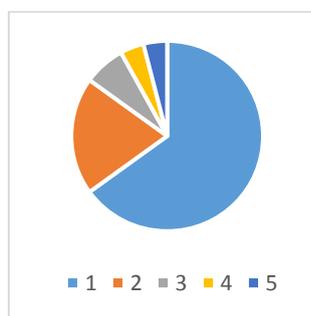
62% of their parents of are illiterates followed by 11% who are able to read and write (only

signature), 14% of the spouses of respondents have completed 7th Standard and only 12% of the husbands have completed their 10th Standard and 1% of the spouses have completed graduation.

**Table 1 showing the occupation of parents**

Sl no	Occupation	%
1	Landless Agriculture labour	65
2	Other activities like Construction work	20
3	Business like street vendors	7
4	Animal Husbandry	4
5	Small Farmers	4

**Figure 1 Showing Occupation**



The data shows that 65% of the fathers of malnourished children are landless Agriculture labourers and 20% of them are involved in the other activities like Construction and Artisan activities on daily basis. 7% of the fathers are involved in Business like street vendors in towns, 4 % of them are engages in Animal husbandry and 4 % of them are Small farmers. They will only around 150 days of work in a year. It may be Seasonal or daily basis, there is no regular monthly income for the parents of malnourished children.

62 % of their mothers are engaged as a Agriculture labours and 38% of them are House wife.Only 22% of the families have land holdings that to drylands and only seasonal crops are grown.

When it comes to the Annual income 73% of the families income is below 25,000 and 18 % of the income is between 25,000 to 50,000 and 9% of the families income is above 50,000. Data also indicates that 69 % of the families’ posses below poverty line ration cards 12 % of them have above Poverty line cards and 19 % of them don’t have the cards. The data also reveals that 39% of the respondents belong to Scheduled caste, 18% belongs to Scheduled Tribe and 42% of the respondents represent Backward caste and only 1% of the respondent belong to forward community.

89% of the malnourished children are utilising Anganwadi& government health service.

#### **4. Results & Conclusion**

The above study indicates that 100% of the parents of the malnourished children are engaged in the unorganised sector work force, where they lack the Job security. The average working day of this families is only 150 days in a year. The study which closely highlights the unavailability of the job for the parents seem to be associated with malnourishment among their children.

In this regard Government has launched many programs like Mahatma Gandhi National rural employment programme, a 100 days' work assurance only 41% of the Families are registered in this work and it shows that most of the people are not benefited from the program. This seems to be one of the social protection schemes for the families of unorganised workers which may not be completely be successful in preventing the malnutrition among the families of malnourished children.

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