A Study on the Prevalence and Impact of Malnutrition among Children Under Five in Selected Villages of Palghar and Thane Districts

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Abstract: *This study investigates the nutritional status of children under the age of five in five villages located in the Palghar and Thane districts of Maharashtra—namely, Bamanpada, Jalkevadi, Vashala, Sayde, and Bhospada. The findings indicate an alarming situation, with all 100 children assessed being underweight. Additionally, half of the children were stunted, and nearly one - third were found to be suffering from wasting. While a majority of caregivers possess basic education, persistent poverty and poor dietary diversity continue to drive malnutrition in these communities.*

Keywords: child malnutrition, rural health, stunting, poverty, nutritional status

1. Introduction

Malnutrition remains a critical public health issue in the tribal belts of Maharashtra, particularly in the Palghar and Thane districts. Despite progressive improvements in health education and maternal awareness, young children continue to be significantly affected by undernutrition. This study aims to highlight the nutritional challenges faced by children under five across five remote villages, while exploring underlying socio - economic and dietary factors contributing to the crisis.

2. Methodology

The study covered five villages: Bamanpada, Jalkevadi, Vashala, Sayde, and Bhospada. A total of 100 children below the age of five were assessed, with approximately 20 children sampled from each village. Data collection was conducted using surveys, physical growth monitoring (measuring height and weight), and structured interviews with caregivers. The following key indicators were examined:
- Weight - for - age (Underweight)
- Height - for - age (Stunting)
- Weight - for - height (Wasting)
- Education level of caregivers

3. Results

Out of the 100 children surveyed:
- 100 children (100%) were found to be underweight, indicating widespread and severe nutritional deficiency.
- 50 children (50%) were identified as stunted, suggesting chronic malnutrition affecting long - term growth.
- 30 children (30%) were suffering from wasting, reflecting recent and acute undernutrition.
- 65 caregivers (65%) had received at least a basic level of education, showing progress in maternal literacy.
- 52 children (52%) had been exclusively breastfed for the first six months, aligning with WHO recommendations.
- 72 families (72%) were living below the poverty line, illustrating the deep - rooted economic challenges in these areas.

4. Discussion

The most concerning observation in this study is the universal prevalence of underweight children. This points to a critical gap in both the quantity and quality of food intake. Despite improvements in maternal education, nutritional knowledge is not effectively translating into better dietary practices due to economic constraints and limited food accessibility.

Stunting and wasting, though less prevalent than underweight status, are still present at substantial levels, indicating both chronic and acute forms of malnutrition. The data suggests that while health education efforts may be gaining ground, structural issues such as poverty and poor food diversity continue to severely hinder progress.

5. Conclusion

Children in the surveyed villages are facing a severe malnutrition crisis. Although a moderate number of caregivers are educated and some are adopting recommended infant feeding practices, economic hardship remains the overriding factor preventing adequate nutrition. The high incidence of underweight children calls for urgent, targeted intervention.

6. Recommendations

To combat this crisis effectively, the following actions are recommended:
- Immediate Nutritional Support: Provide high - protein and high - calorie supplements through local Anganwadi centers.
- Dietary Diversification: Encourage the use of locally available, low - cost nutritious ingredients through awareness campaigns and recipe demonstrations.

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- Growth Monitoring: Establish regular child growth tracking through trained community health workers, with follow - up counseling.
- Community Kitchens: Set up temporary nutrition centers in severely affected villages to provide meals to underweight children.
- Poverty Alleviation: Strengthen and expand job guarantee schemes like MGNREGA and ensure access to government food security programs for all vulnerable families.

References

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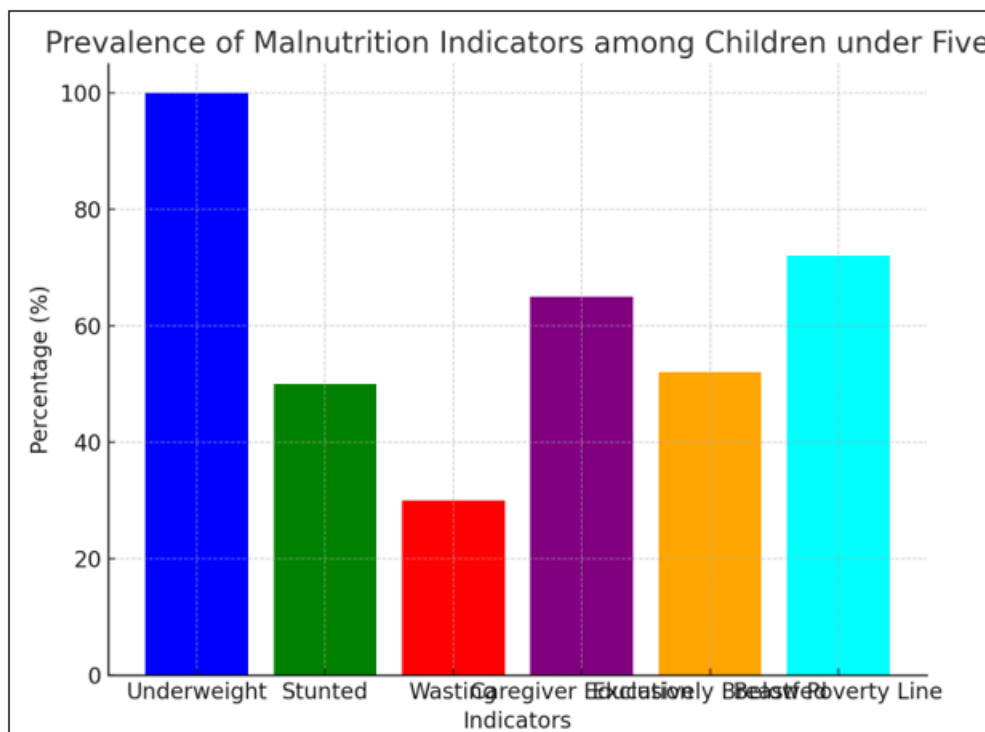[4] Maharashtra Tribal Development Department (2023). Village Nutrition Status Reports

Figure 1: Prevalence of Malnutrition Indicators among Children under Five