



Wadia Journal of Women and Child Health

Brief Communication

Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on nutrition in children in the age group of 0–5 years

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Received: 18 December 2023

Accepted: 02 January 2024

Published: 01 February 2024

DOI

10.25259/WJWCH_48_2023

Although children accounted for only 17.9% of all cases of covid infection, the social effects of COVID-19 pandemic had a profound impact on this vulnerable population. COVID-19 pandemic affected children across the world, and the consequences on their health and nutritional status have been more pronounced in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs).^[1] We expected a reduction in food intake in LMICs due to income losses related to lockdowns and disruption of food supply chains. Furthermore, limited access to healthcare facilities and nutrition programs impacted the early detection and management of malnutrition in children. We wanted to understand the trend of malnutrition among children before and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Parents of 100 consecutive children who visited our hospital in the out-patient department (OPD) and well-baby clinic were interviewed using a questionnaire after obtaining their prior consent. Their medical records were checked for weight recorded just prior to the pandemic and weight at time of assessment which was one year after lockdown was lifted. From a preliminary analysis, based on their weight before and after the lockdown, we found that significantly more number of children i.e 77.8% had normal weight for age post lockdown as compared to 66.7% children pre lockdown. Interestingly, there was a statistically significant decline in the percentage of severely underweight children from 23.2% in pre-covid to 13.1% in post-covid period (90% Confidence Interval). We found no significant association between underweight and gender, place of residence, employment status of parents, parental education, quantity of food received or difficulties in food procurement, immunization, COVID-19 illness in the family, migration status of the family, or health status of the caretaker in the post-covid period.

Governments and humanitarian organizations worldwide implemented measures to address food insecurity during the pandemic, through food assistance programs and social safety nets for vulnerable populations, including children. Many government and non government organisation (NGO) programs distributed nutritional supplements, promoted breastfeeding, and provided education on balanced diets. During the pandemic, preventive measures such as hand washing, social distancing, and wearing masks likely contributed to a decrease in other infections such as seasonal flu, respiratory and gastrointestinal illnesses.^[2] Children are more likely to have a robust innate immune response, which may lead to early infection control.^[3] Fewer respiratory and gastrointestinal infections have a positive effect on a child's overall health and nutritional status. With school closures and curtailment of outdoor activities, parents spent more time with their children, leading to increased attention to their nutritional needs and well-being. Some families have opted for healthier, home-cooked meals.^[4] Food products with longer

How to cite this article: Vora AA, Mathur R. Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on nutrition in children in the age group of 0–5 years. Wadia J Women Child Health. 2023;2(3):150-1. doi: 10.25259/WJWCH_48_2023

shelf lives and sustainability, such as high-calorie snacks and non-perishable commodities were purchased more frequently as a result.

As we have surveyed parents from an urban tertiary care center and not from the community, the perspective is limited. Long-term monitoring and evaluation will be necessary to understand the pandemic's full impact on child nutrition and take appropriate actions to address any emerging issues. Continual investment in health and nutrition programs, even after the pandemic, will be vital in ensuring the well-being and future development of children worldwide.

Ethical approval

Institutional Review Board approval is not required.

Declaration of patient consent

The authors certify that they have obtained all appropriate patient consent.

Financial support and sponsorship

Nil.

Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

Use of artificial intelligence (AI)-assisted technology for manuscript preparation

The authors confirm that there was no use of artificial intelligence (AI)-assisted technology for assisting in the writing or editing of the manuscript and no images were manipulated using AI.

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