

Unravelling the Interplay between Culture of Poverty and Malnutrition in Pakistan

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Abstract

This article examines how Pakistan's poverty and malnutrition cultures are connected. Pakistan is a developing country that has had incredible economic growth in recent years, but it still struggles with widespread poverty and malnutrition, especially among its urban and rural areas. This abstract, which takes a multidisciplinary perspective, explores the complicated network of socioeconomic variables, cultural norms, and institutional hurdles that degenerate the nation's poverty and malnutrition. It looks at how the interplay of historical, political, and cultural forces shapes people's everyday experiences and feeds the cycle of poverty and starvation in communities. Additionally, it examines how poor access to healthcare, education, and other necessities affects nutritional outcomes, emphasizing the necessity of comprehensive policy initiatives that address the underlying causes of poverty and give nutrition security a priority. This abstract highlight the need for comprehensive approaches to end Pakistan's cycle of poverty and malnutrition by illuminating these interrelated issues. This research is done in slum areas of Islamabad (H-9 and I-II) and Rawalpindi (Phir Wadhai), where people are facing issues of poverty and the culture of poverty. The data was collected from 130 respondents with a detailed discussion to find cultural practices and the effects of malnutrition in these specific areas.

Keywords: Interplay, Culture, Poverty, Malnutrition, Pakistan

Introduction

Comprehending the complicated interplay among culture, poverty, and malnourishment is crucial in tackling delicate socioeconomic issues. Oscar Lewis, a sociologist, popularized the term "culture of poverty" in the 1960s to describe the distinct values, attitudes, and behaviours that people in poverty acquire and carry down through the generations. Feelings of helplessness, restricted access to resources, and a sense of social exclusion are common characteristics of this culture. On the other hand, malnutrition refers to a variety of disorders brought on by insufficient consumption of nutrients necessary for healthy growth and development. Although it can afflict people from all socioeconomic levels, it is more common in underprivileged areas where there is little access to wholesome food, potable water, and medical treatment.

The following are some major ways that the poverty culture affects nutritional outcomes:

Restricted Access to Nutritious Food and cultural changes: It is common for impoverished communities to lack supermarkets or grocery stores that supply reasonably priced, fresh vegetables. Alternatively, locals could depend on fast food restaurants or convenience stores, which mostly sell processed meals that are heavy in calories but lacking in important nutrients. The cultural changes are also having a strong impact on eating habits. People prefer to eat fast food instead of healthy things. KFC, McDonald, and other fast-food restaurants offer the cheapest food which admire the public to take this choice. Food insecurity is the state in

which people and families lack regular access to a sufficient and nourishing diet. It is a result of both economic instability and low pay. This may lead to erratic eating habits, an emphasis on inexpensive, high-calorie items, and complete meal skipping.

Lack of Nutritional knowledge: Resources that support good eating habits and nutritional knowledge may be hard to come by in impoverished areas. Malnutrition may come from people not having the information and abilities necessary to make wise food decisions.

Healthcare Disparities: Lack of access to healthcare services, such as dietary counselling and preventative treatment, is often linked to poverty. Malnourished people may not receive the proper medical care, which might lead to an undetected and untreated condition that worsens the situation.

To effectively address the poverty culture and its correlation with malnourishment, a comprehensive strategy incorporating social, economic, and cultural aspects is necessary. This entails putting laws into place that support systemic injustices, advance economic growth, and increase access to healthcare and education. Furthermore, programs that support sustainable agriculture, provide food security, and educate people about nutrition may be extremely effective in reducing the negative effects of poverty on nutritional outcomes.

Literature Review:

A review of the research on the relationship between poverty and malnutrition shows that social, cultural, and environmental variables interact in a complicated way to affect nutritional outcomes in populations facing poverty. The main conclusions from pertinent research are outlined below:

Malnutrition's Socioeconomic Determinants:

Several studies prove the robust correlation between hunger and poverty. Malnutrition results from insufficient nutritional intake and food insecurity caused by low income, unstable economies, and restricted access to basic requirements ¹(Black et al., 2008; Smith & Haddad, 2015).

Cultural Practices and Beliefs:

In disadvantaged areas, cultural variables greatly influence eating patterns and nutritional practices. Nutritional status is affected by dietary choices and consumption patterns that are influenced by cultural norms, food preferences, and traditional ideas about health and nutrition ²(Popkin, Adair, & Ng, 2012; Temesgen, 2014).

Access to and Environment of Food:

Poor people often have limited access to reasonably priced, nutrient-dense food alternatives, with an excess of inexpensive, high-energy but low-nutrient options available. Accessing healthful meals is made more difficult by the scarcity of fresh produce, poor transportation, and the occurrence of food deserts ³(Drewnowski & Specter, 2004; Gundersen, 2019).

Healthcare Inequalities

Malnutrition is a problem in areas affected by poverty that is made worse by differences in healthcare access and usage. The persistence of malnutrition is attributed to limited access to healthcare services, such as nutritional counselling, preventative care, and treatment for underlying health issues ⁴(Ruel, Alderman, & Maternal and Child Nutrition Study Group, 2013; Himmel green et al., 2019).

Transmission of Poverty and Malnutrition Across Generations

Poverty is a culture often passed down through the generations, and socioeconomic disadvantages impact dietary outcomes from childhood to maturity. Complex pathways including social, economic, and environmental variables contribute to the intergenerational transmission of poverty and malnutrition, perpetuating the cycle of deprivation ⁵(Larson & Story, 2011; Webb, 2018).

Interventions and Consequences for Policy:

Comprehensive strategies that address underlying socioeconomic variables are necessary for effective interventions to combat the culture of poverty and hunger. To improve nutritional outcomes for disadvantaged communities, policies that focus on food environments and healthcare access, community-based interventions, income support programs, nutrition education, and other strategies are essential (Bhutta et al., 2013; FAO ⁶(Food and Agriculture Organization) & WHO (World Health Organization), 2018).

To successfully address this intricate public health issue, the literature emphasizes the complicated link that exists between the culture of poverty and malnutrition, underscoring the necessity for comprehensive interventions that target socioeconomic, cultural, and environmental issues.

Objectives:

- Examine and figure out the cultural norms, attitudes, and practices that either cause or worsen malnutrition in Pakistan's underprivileged areas.
- To explore the socioeconomic variables linked to poverty in Pakistan and the ways in which they affect food habits, availability of nutrient-dense food, medical procedures, and nutritional status in general.
- To study how people in poverty behave when it comes to their health and nutrition, including how they choose to eat, how they keep themselves clean, and how they seek medical attention.

Theoretical Framework

Several theoretical frameworks can be used to analyse the relationship between Pakistan's poverty culture and malnutrition, including:

According to structural functionalism, society is seen as a complex system whose components cooperate to uphold solidarity and stability. Structural functionalism would examine the ways in which cultural norms and behaviours within impoverished communities contribute to the continuation of malnutrition in the context of poverty and malnutrition in Pakistan. It would look at the roles that poverty plays in these communities and how it influences eating patterns, food preferences, and availability of nutrient-dense foods.

According to intersectionality theory, people and groups meet various forms of privilege and oppression that overlap depending on their race, class, gender, and ethnicity. An intersectional approach would examine how different overlapping identities and social categories interact to influence experiences of poverty and availability to nutrient-dense food in the context of poverty and malnutrition in Pakistan. It would look at how malnutrition among marginalized people is made worse by the intersection of cultural norms and practices with other types of social inequality.

These theoretical frameworks offer many perspectives for examining the interactions between Pakistan's poverty and malnutrition cultures, emphasizing the intricate social, economic, and cultural elements that influence this problem. Scholars may use several frameworks to acquire a thorough comprehension of the fundamental reasons behind malnourishment and create efficient remedies to tackle this problem in Pakistan.

Research Methodology

To investigate the relationship between Pakistan's poverty culture and malnutrition, a mixed-methods study design was used for gathering data. To give a thorough grasp of the intricate interaction between various aspects, this technique integrated qualitative methodology.

Qualitative Data Collection: To investigate the cultural dimensions of poverty and their influence on dietary choices, health-seeking behaviours, and nutrition practices, conduct focus groups, in-depth interviews, or ethnographic research. Participant observations, interview guide and survey methods were used to collect data from respondents. Key informants were there to provide information about locality and helped to make interaction with respondents.

Table I: Dimensions of Poverty and Malnutrition

| Dimensions of Poverty and Malnutrition | | |
|--|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Socio-economic | Behavioural Intension | Actions |
| Locality | Perfervid norms | Normal |
| Education | Attitude | Understanding of health condition |
| Income | Health Seeking | Stunted |
| Parity | Behaviours towards health conditions | Wasting food |
| Access to Food | | |
| Culture | | |

Results and Discussions:

Researchers looked at important themes and takeaways from the research to talk about the outcomes and conclusions of a study on the relationship between culture of poverty and malnutrition. This is how a conversation like that could go:

The study discovered that nutritional results within Pakistan's underprivileged groups are greatly influenced by cultural norms and dietary practices. Traditional dietary choices, for instance, can favour carbohydrates over protein and other micronutrients, which could result in malnutrition and unbalanced diets. Furthermore, food insecurity may be made worse by cultural norms like high family sizes and early marriage, especially for women and children.

Table 2: Children ration for Malnutrition

Children ration for Malnutrition

| Age | Issues | Reformation of norms |
|-------|--|--|
| 1-6 | Health and low weight | Eating without washing hands |
| 6-12 | Problems of education, health conditions and weakness | Unable to follow cultural norms due to unawareness and problems of less facilities |
| 13-18 | Involved in earning money and avoiding taking care of health | More interested to work and get money without following cultural norms which leads towards bad habits. |

Gender dynamics have been identified as a crucial element affecting household food distribution and access. According to the research, women in many Pakistani disadvantaged areas have little influence over decisions about what to eat and how to distribute resources. As a result, compared to men, women and children are more likely to receive smaller portions of food or less nutritious meals, which causes them to suffer from malnutrition.

The research proved how Pakistan's socioeconomic disparities contribute to the country's ongoing malnutrition. Poor communities have trouble getting access to wholesome food because of a lack of infrastructure, insufficient social services, and limited financial resources. Furthermore, people may be discouraged from asking for help or using existing resources due to cultural norms and shame attached to poverty, which exacerbates.

Research emphasized how poverty interacts with other social determinants of health, including access to healthcare, work, and education. Access to resources and services necessary to combat malnutrition is sometimes hampered by poverty. In addition, structural injustices and prejudice cause marginalized groups such as rural communities, ethnic minorities, and internally displaced people—to confront exacerbated problems with poverty and malnourishment.

This research found examples of adaptive coping strategies and cultural resilience in communities that were confronting serious issues associated with poverty and malnutrition. For example, to alleviate food insecurity and enhance nutritional well-being, communities may rely on unofficial social networks, traditional farming methods, and community-based projects.

The study emphasizes the significance of tackling the structural factors that contribute to poverty and malnutrition in Pakistan based on its findings. A multi-sectoral strategy should be used for policy initiatives that target not only food security but also more general socioeconomic disparities in areas like healthcare, work, and education. Furthermore, culturally proper interventions that involve local communities and make use of pre-existing social networks might augment the efficacy and durability of initiatives aimed at enhancing nutritional outcomes in Pakistan.

Given the circumstances, the study clarifies the intricate relationship between Pakistan's poverty culture and malnutrition, emphasizing the necessity for all-encompassing, culturally proper approaches to deal with this pressing public health concern.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, understanding the complicated relationship between Pakistan's poverty culture and malnutrition requires a comprehensive grasp of the socioeconomic, cultural, and structural aspects at play. Pakistan can try to break the cycle of poverty and improve nutritional outcomes for its most vulnerable communities by tackling the underlying causes of malnutrition and poverty and putting targeted interventions into place.

In conclusion, the culture of poverty shapes access to resources, information, and healthcare services, which in turn affects the incidence of malnutrition. Developing solutions that effectively battle poverty and enhance nutritional outcomes in vulnerable populations requires an understanding of these intricate links and how to address them.

¹ Black, R. E., Allen, L. H., Bhutta, Z. A., Caulfield, L. E., de Onis, M., Ezzati, M., & Maternal and Child Undernutrition Study Group. (2008). *Maternal and child malnutrition: global and regional exposures and health consequences*. *The Lancet*, 371(9608), 243-260.

² Popkin, B. M., Adair, L. S., & Ng, S. W. (2012). *Global nutrition transition and the pandemic of obesity in developing countries*. *Nutrition Reviews*, 70(1), 3-21.

³ Drewnowski, A., & Specter, S. E. (2004). *Poverty and obesity: the role of energy density and energy costs*. The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, 79(1), 6-16.

⁴ Ruel, M. T., Alderman, H., & Maternal and Child Nutrition Study Group. (2013). *Nutrition-sensitive interventions and programmes: how can they help to accelerate progress in improving maternal and child nutrition?* The Lancet, 382(9891), 536-551.

⁵ Larson, N. I., & Story, M. T. (2011). *Food insecurity and weight status among US children and families: a review of the literature*. American Journal of Preventive Medicine, 40(2), 166-173.

⁶ Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) & World Health Organization (WHO). (2018). *Influencing food environments for healthy diets*. Retrieved from <http://www.fao.org/3/i3907e/i3907e.pdf>