

Review Article

# Malnutrition in Bihar

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**ABSTRACT**

*Agriculture sector occupies center stage of India's social security and overall economic welfare. ICAR, an autonomous body created in 1929 is working on its vision to attain "Rainbow Revolution" making India a developed nation free of poverty, hunger, malnutrition and environmental safety. Although there has been significant increase in food grain production since India's Independence but there remains the problem of malnutrition. This paper discusses malnutrition in Bihar, the climate change associated with it and some recommendations.*

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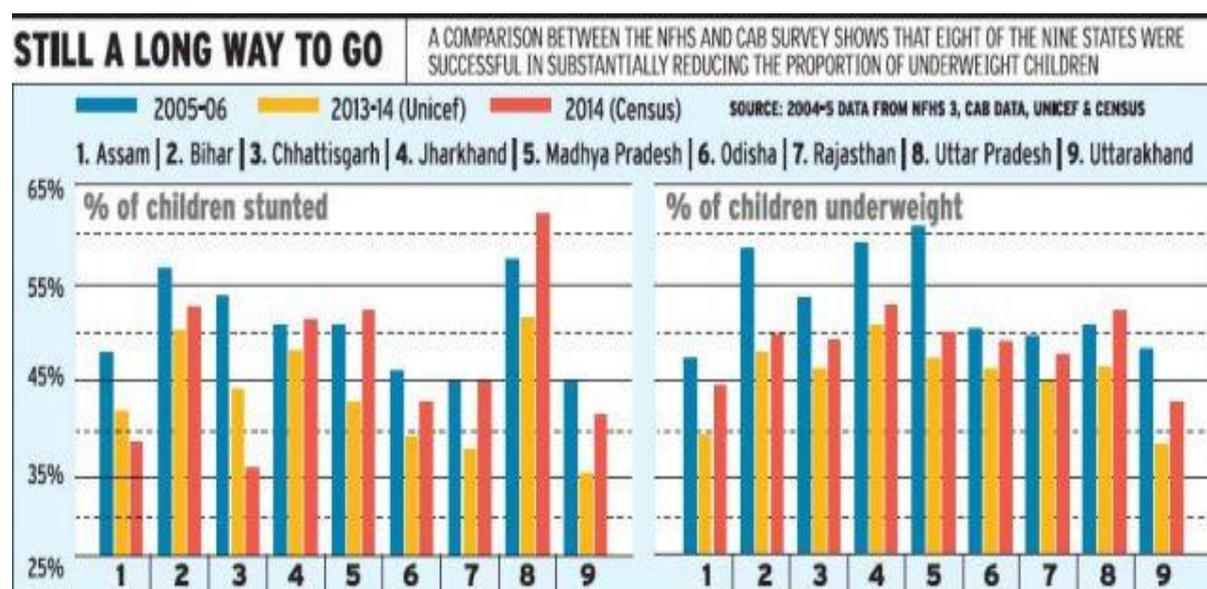
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Malnutrition is estimated to contribute more than one third of all child deaths, although it is rarely listed as the direct cause. Contributing to more than half of deaths in children worldwide; child malnutrition was associated with 54% of deaths in children in developing countries in 2001. Poverty remains the major contributor to this ill. The vicious cycle of poverty, disease and illness aggravates this situation. The impact of malnutrition usually falls mainly on children under five years of age. Grooming undernourished children causes children to start life at mentally sub optimal levels. This becomes a serious developmental threat. Lack of education especially amongst women disadvantages children, especially as far as healthy practices like breastfeeding and child healthy foods are concerned. Adverse climatic conditions have also played significant roles like droughts, poor soils and deforestation. Sociocultural barriers are major hindrances in some communities, with female children usually being the most affected. Corruption and lack of government interest and investment are key players that must be addressed to solve this problem. A multi-sectorial approach is vital in tackling this problem. Improvement in government policy, fight against corruption, adopting a horizontal approach in implementing programs at community level must be recognized. Genetically modified foods to increase food production and to survive adverse climatic conditions could be gateways in solving these problems. Socio cultural peculiarities of each community are an essential base line consideration for the implementation of any nutrition health promotion programs. Bihar's child malnutrition rate is higher than most country in the world. Over half of the children under five years of age are underweight or stunted, indicating chronic malnourishment (NFHS-3). The 2008 India State Hunger Index (ISHI) ranked Bihar 15th of 17 states surveyed. Bihar notably ranked below average in the proportion of underweight children (56.1% vs. 42.5%). In 2005-6 the WHO found that of Bihari children aged 0-5, 56.4% were -2 standard deviations or more from the ideal weight (mean of 0) and 25.4% were -3 or more standard deviations from the mean. A malnourished child is more susceptible to disease and can suffer permanent mental and physical damage. The first 2-3 years are the most critical for preventing long-term damage. A lack of safe water can compromise hygiene and increase the risk of diarrheal disease, which kills 2.2 million people every year. Increasingly variable rainfall patterns are likely to affect the supply of fresh water. In extreme cases, water scarcity leads to drought and famine. By the 2090s, climate change is likely to widen the area affected by drought, double the frequency of extreme droughts and increase their average duration six-fold. According to the World Health Organization, many of the major killers such as diarrheal diseases,

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malnutrition, malaria and dengue are highly climate- sensitive and are expected to worsen as the climate changes.

Improving the educational status of parents, especially of mothers, on nutrition, sanitation and common disease prevention strategies should logically reduce the malnutrition related mortality and morbidity. It is said that the way to the child's stomach is through the mind of the mother. Quality of food taken, choices and quantity are all at the discretion of the mother or care giver. The burden of malnutrition has been directly linked to poverty, quality of food intake, excessive disease and poor health status. The relationship between education and poverty is too close, and virtually integrates into the virtual cycle of Ignorance, disease and poverty. Education could help reduce excessively large family sizes that are usually seen in some districts of Bihar. A poor community of certain cultural beliefs might not actually realize that giving birth to a fewer number of children might actually help them to match their limited resources, and also offer adequate and quality nutrition to the family. There should be use of standard growth measures as most Sevikas in AWC. There is different method of recordkeeping in different AWC. Each AWC should use same technique to collect growth data to make it easy for ICDS to respond appropriately. As older children are less vulnerable to malnutrition, focus should be maintained on children aged 0-2. Healthier location should be rented for AWC as many AWC are located near trash dumps or standing water. The use of modern agricultural techniques to increase food production is very essential. Improvement of the transport system to give access to locals to sell their local produce to raise incomes for their families is important.



## CONCLUSION

Despite extensive economic growth in recent decades, millions of people still remains locked in a vicious cycle of hunger and poverty. Poverty means parents can't feed their families with enough nutritious food, living children malnourished. Malnutrition leads to irreversibly stunted development and shorter, less productive lives. Less productive lives mean no escape from poverty. Low levels of education especially in women are key perpetuators of poor nutrition practices in this region. Children under five are the most affected. Male children tend to have better health status than females in certain communities. The problem is further aggravated by adverse climatic conditions, with floods in some areas. Government policy has not been very successful most of the time, because most governments fail to consider this as a serious issue. Although much improvement has been noticed in past

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year and with the proper attention of bureaucrats and proper legislation much can be achieved. Malnutrition remains a very larger picture that should not go unnoticed. Further research involving the potential acceptability of new agricultural technologies, modern farming methods and genetically modified foods should be undertaken. Understanding the socio cultural peculiarities of the milieu is fundamental.

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