GENDER AND NUTRITION META-ANALYSIS: AN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

AN ACTION AGAINST HUNGER CANADA AND UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO PROJECT EXPLORING GENDER AND NUTRITION IN EMERGENCIES

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There is growing evidence that gender inequality is positively associated with malnutrition. In response to this evidence, Action Against Hunger has been making efforts to increase the gender sensitivity of its operations and is striving to facilitate shifts in gender norms and structures towards gender equality. The collaboration for this meta-analysis project between Action Against Hunger Canada and the University of Toronto leveraged complementary expertise and capacity to empower communities to address gender inequality and provide useful knowledge in fighting malnutrition through a gender-transformative approach.

METHODS

The Gender Transformative Framework for Nutrition (GTFN) was used as the main analytical framework for this project. Mixed methods analyses were conducted to understand the differences in undernutrition among sexes within seven countries of interest (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Somalia, South Sudan, and Yemen) and to detect whether the status of undernutrition differs between sexes. Secondary questions were concurrently identified to explore the relationship of other plausible factors that may cause differences in nutrition outcomes (in addition to gender), such as geography and access to undernutrition services.

In addition to a secondary data review, data from sub-national SMART (Standardized Monitoring and Assessment of Relief and Transitions) surveys were analyzed using Bayesian statistical methods. Qualitative data were collected via key informant interviews, where respondents were selected using purposive and snowball sampling. Reponses from seventeen participants were explored through deductive thematic analysis.

RESULTS

This meta-analysis was iterative in nature, with various learnings and outputs to support Action Against Hunger's aim to move towards gender transformative action. The quantitative component of this project assessed acute and chronic malnutrition indicators by sex across seven countries. Findings showed that boys under five had significantly higher odds of being malnourished than girls when assessed using WHZ for GAM and SAM (GAM WHZ: OR 1.30, 95% CrI: 1.23-1.38; SAM WHZ: OR 1.47, 95% CrI: 1.33-1.63). Measures for chronic undernutrition indicated that boys under five had significantly higher odds of stunting than girls under five (OR 1.45, 95% CrI: 1.37-1.53). MUAC measurements, however, indicated that boys under five had lower odds of being malnourished (GAM MUAC: 0.82, 95% CrI: 0.77-0.87; SAM MUAC: OR 0.87, CrI: 0.78-0.97). An analysis was then run using combined indices for GAM and SAM, this assessment indicated that there were *slightly* higher odds of malnutrition among male children based on cGAM and cSAM (cGAM: OR 1.06, CrI: 1.01-1.12; cSAM: OR 1.10, CrI: 1.01-1.20). Although results by cGAM and cSAM exhibit statistical significance, these results should be interpreted clinically with caution.

A landscaping review was conducted alongside the qualitative analyses to identify the availability of SADD and gender metrics across Humanitarian Needs Overviews, Humanitarian Response Plans, and country dashboards for comparison against SMART survey data. Results from this landscaping review revealed a paucity of SADD and a lack of consistency collected and available standardized gender metrics. The qualitative component of the project helped to further interpret the quantitative findings that boys have slightly higher odds of malnutrition when compared with girls. Respondents cited potential reasons such as biological differences between sexes, boys having increased exposure to infection, differential care practices for girls and boys, and gendered societal norms.

CONCLUSION

This collaborative effort aimed to develop a deeper understanding of the gendered nature of malnutrition in humanitarian and emergency contexts. This report highlights the need for consistent SADD collection, and standardized gender metrics, across the sector to 1) bolster data quality for gender and 2) provide greater insight into outcomes by sex and gender. This report also highlights the importance of integrating a gender transformative approach into nutrition programming, to challenge entrenched power dynamics and structures that perpetuate gender inequalities. We invite all stakeholders in the fight against hunger and gender inequality to engage with this report's findings and recommendations. Together we can drive meaningful change towards a more equitable and nourished world.