



Date -5 March 2024

TWOFOLD HEALTH DILEMMA OF INDIA

THIS ARTICLE COVERS 'DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS' AND THE TOPIC DETAILS OF "TWOFOLD HEALTH DILEMMA OF INDIA". THIS TOPIC IS RELEVANT IN THE "SOCIAL ISSUES AND GOVERNANCE" SECTION OF THE UPSC CSE EXAM.

WHY IN THE NEWS?

The research published in The Lancet emphasises a twofold health dilemma in India, noting a substantial rise in obesity rates among both adults and children over the last 32 years. This phenomenon coexists with the ongoing prevalence of undernutrition, posing a "double burden" on the nation's healthcare system.

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE LANCET STUDY ON OBESITY AND UNDERWEIGHT IN INDIA

- **Obesity in India:**

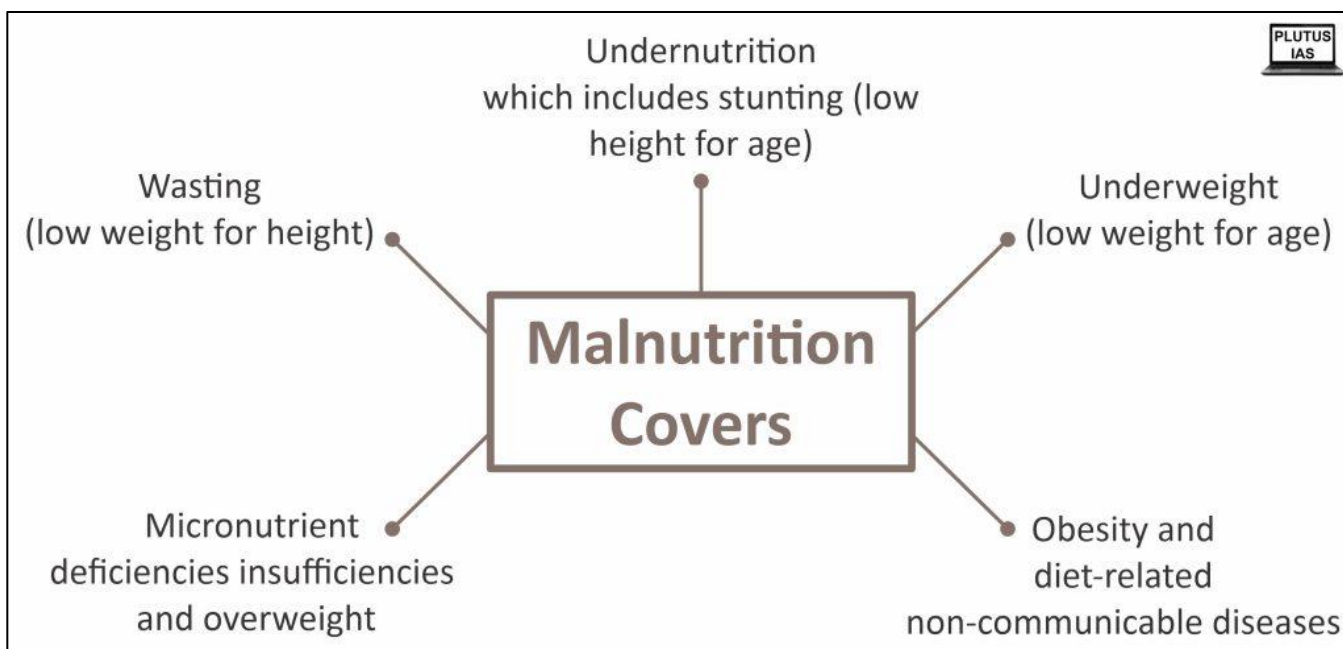
1. **Significant increase:** The study revealed a dramatic rise in obesity rates among women, jumping from 1.2% in 1990 to 9.8% in 2022, translating to 44 million women affected.
2. **Men not immune:** While less pronounced, male obesity rates also saw an increase of nearly 5 percentage points over the same period, with 26 million men classified as obese in 2022.
3. **Childhood concern:** Importantly, the study highlighted a concerning trend of rising childhood obesity, with girls experiencing a 3% increase and boys a 3.7% increase over 32 years. This means 3.1% of girls and 3.9% of boys were classified as obese in 2022.

- **Undernutrition persists:**

1. **Double burden:** Despite a decrease, underweight and thinness remain significant concerns across all genders and age groups. The study reported 13.7% of women and 12.5% of men were categorised as underweight.
2. **Global issue:** Girls in India face the world's highest prevalence of thinness (20.3%), while boys rank second (21.7%).

- **Possible reasons for the gender disparity in obesity:**

1. **Limited access to activity:** The study suggests limited access to physical activities like walking or gym memberships, particularly for women, might contribute to their higher obesity rates.
2. **Prioritising family needs:** Additionally, women may prioritise the family's nutritional needs over their own, potentially impacting their personal health.
3. **Central obesity concerns:** The study emphasises that considering central obesity (excess abdominal fat), which is a stronger predictor of health risks, could significantly raise the estimated obesity rate for women in certain regions to 40-50%.



OBESITY

Definition: Obesity signifies an abnormal or excessive accumulation of body fat, posing significant health risks. This includes increased chances of developing chronic conditions like heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and certain cancers.

- **Measurement:**

1. **Adults (20+ years):** A Body Mass Index (BMI) of 30 kg/m² or higher indicates obesity in adults.
2. **Children & Adolescents (5-19 years):** For children and adolescents, obesity is determined by comparing their BMI to age-specific reference charts. A value exceeding the mean by two standard deviations falls into the obese category.
3. **Calculating BMI:** BMI is calculated using a simple formula: BMI = Weight (kg) / Height (m)².

UNDERWEIGHT

- **Definition:** Underweight refers to having insufficient body weight relative to one's height, often indicating potential nutritional deficiencies. Individuals who are underweight may be more susceptible to infections and other health complications.
 - **Measurement:**
1. **Adults (20+ years):** A BMI below 18 kg/m² falls under the underweight category for adults.
 2. **Children & Adolescents (5-19 years):** Similar to obesity, underweight in children and adolescents is determined using age-specific BMI charts. A value falling two standard deviations below the mean indicates underweight.
 3. **Calculating BMI:** As with obesity, BMI calculation follows the same formula: BMI = Weight (kg) / Height (m)².

DOUBLE BURDEN: A COMPLEX THREAT TO HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

- **Individual Consequences**

1. **Non-Communicable Disease Risk:** Individuals struggling with both undernutrition and obesity face a heightened risk of developing chronic illnesses like diabetes, heart disease, and high blood

pressure. This complex interplay of malnutrition can significantly impact metabolism and cardiovascular health.

2. **Weakened Immune System:** Undernutrition weakens the body's defences, making individuals more susceptible to infections. Conversely, obesity can lead to chronic inflammation, further compromising immune function.
3. **Stunted Development in Children:** When both undernutrition and obesity co-exist in children, it can hinder their physical and cognitive development, leading to both immediate and long-term health challenges.
4. **Psychosocial Impact:** The double burden can have significant psychological and social implications, including body image issues and mental health concerns. Societal pressures and stigma associated with weight can contribute to these challenges.

- **Public Health Challenges**

1. **Strained Healthcare Systems:** Managing the double burden poses a significant challenge for healthcare systems. Addressing the diverse and often conflicting nutritional needs of the population requires complex resource allocation and planning.
2. **Challenging Interventions:** Designing and implementing effective public health interventions becomes more complex when addressing both undernutrition and obesity simultaneously. Tailoring interventions to the specific needs of different populations is crucial for success.

- **Economic Impact**

1. **Increased Healthcare Costs:** The presence of both undernutrition and obesity significantly strains healthcare systems. Managing the chronic illnesses associated with obesity requires substantial resources, leading to increased healthcare costs.
2. **Reduced Productivity:** Health issues arising from the double burden can negatively impact workforce productivity. Absenteeism and decreased work efficiency lead to economic losses for individuals and the nation as a whole.
3. **Intergenerational Effects:** Stunted development in children can have lasting consequences, perpetuating a cycle of health issues and economic disadvantages across generations.

PRELIMS PRACTISE QUESTIONS

Q1. Consider the following statements:

1. Anganwadi Services Scheme provides supplementary nutrition to children in the age group of 6 months to 6 years and pregnant/lactating mothers.
2. Beti Bachao Beti Padhao initiative addresses the nutritional needs of pregnant and lactating women by providing them with cash incentives.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: A

Q2. What is the primary objective of the Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan?

- (a) Ensuring safe delivery
- (b) Reducing maternal mortality
- (c) Promoting family planning

(d) Providing financial assistance to pregnant women

Answer: B

MAINS PRACTISE QUESTION

Q1. In the context of public health, discuss the complex interplay between undernutrition and obesity. How do these seemingly contradictory issues coexist, and what challenges do they pose for healthcare systems?

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