

ASSESSING DIMENSIONS OF FOOD INSECURITY AMONG OLDER PEOPLE

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Introduction

Food security is a basic requirement for health and well-being, but in the case of the elderly population this is more important. Food insecurity among the elderly citizens will lead to several complications in the overall economy, society, community and household, and impacts cultural and household formation. Contrary to the nonelderly age group, there are several factors related to the nutritional and health status of aged people, namely food insecurity (1). Food security programmes benefit from critical and systematic assessment of all dimensions of food insecurity. Planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating the programmes based on the assessment always brings better results, but assessing all domains and covering them all in a programme is a difficult task. There are several aspects related to the food insecurity of older people, they are different from nonelderly people and exclusively related to older people, and as these aspects are exclusively related to elderly people, they can be called the gerontology dimension. Assessing general aspects of food insecurity or aspects related to nonelderly people cannot give adequate information pertaining to aged people because there are aspects exclusively related to aged people. Age related discrimination and elder abuse can be stated as examples for factors exclusively related to aged people which negatively impact the food security of aged people. As food insecurity among aged people is a significant problem and every government has to give priority to addressing the problem and make sure that every senior citizen gets adequate food for healthy living, having adequate and accurate data about the food security status of older people is a fundamental requirement, and to have adequate and accurate data all dimensions, including dimension, of food security of older people to be assessed.

2. Definition and Dimensions

Food security of individuals and households is about availability of nutritious and safe foods and their ability to continually access and consume the available foods. "Food insecurity of individual is about an individual feeling and experience; it includes the fear of

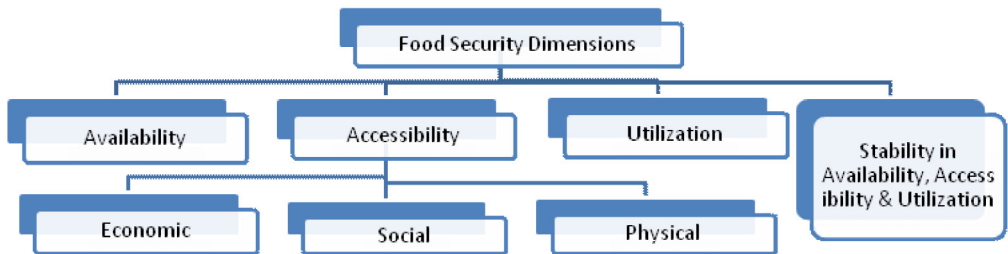
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running out of food or resources to buy food and in the later stage of the food insecurity spectrum, the insecure individual may even go without food or without the possibility to acquire them, failing meals and eventually experiencing the physical sensation of hunger" (2, 3). The World Summit on Food Security stated, "Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. The four pillars of food security are availability, access, utilization and stability." (World Summit on Food Security, Rome, 16-18 November 2009).

The definition clearly indicates the four dimensions of food security; they are physical availability of food; economic, social and physical access to food; food utilization; and stability of the other three dimensions over time. The dimensions based on the definition are not a new phenomenon but are accepted all over the world, but to assess the food insecurity of the people, all these dimensions are not measured. The often used dimension to assess food insecurity is economic accessibility and all other dimensions are very rarely used to assess food in households and individuals.

Figure 1: Dimensions of Food Security



3. Food Security is a Human Right

As far as food is concerned, it is one among several human rights; food insecurity can be considered as a result of the non-fulfilment of the right to food. The right to food is a vision of several nations and it is a human right recognized by the majority of nations (4). When a nation fails to make appropriate interventions to address the food insecurity of its elderly population, it fails to fulfil the fundamental human right of the elderly population. So, the responsibility of every nation is to make sure that their senior citizens get adequate food for healthy living and the food should be available without affecting their dignity. The available data based on several surveys about food insecurity among older persons indicate the failure of several nations in fulfilling their responsibility and fundamental human right. For example, approximately 4.8 million older people are food insecure in the USA (5). 67 percent of households with older members were having some level of food insecurity in Mexico (6). 23 percent of the aged people were food insecure in Portugal (7, 8). So, assessing

all dimensions of food security among older people will give adequate information to plan and implement programmes to fulfil food security which is a fundamental human right.

4. Population Ageing

In several nations in the world, growth in the size and proportion of older persons in their population is happening and it is often considered as a global phenomenon. So, every Government has to plan and implement new policies particularly targeted to the needs of aged persons, including their food insecurity. The proportion of older people has been increasing and this increase brings financial pressure on old-age support systems (9) and brings additional challenges on health of aged people, and social services and public policy for aged people (2). The developed nations already entered into the elderly population era and the phenomenon is in progress in developing nations.

According to 2015 report by the Population Division of the United Nations, "Between 2015 and 2030, the number of older persons, those aged 60 years or over, in the world is projected to grow by 56 percent, from 901 million to more than 1.4 billion; virtually all countries are expected to see substantial growth in the number of older persons between 2015 and 2030, and that growth will be faster in the developing regions than the developed regions; in 2015, one in eight people worldwide was aged 60 or over, but by 2030, older persons are projected to account for one in six people globally" (10).

According to the United Nations report 2019, "There were 703 million persons aged 65 years or over in the world in 2019; the number of older persons is projected to double to 1.5 billion in 2050; globally, the share of the population aged 65 years or over increased from 6 percent in 1990 to 9 percent in 2019 and the proportion is projected to rise further to 16 percent by 2050, so that one in six people in the world will be aged 65 years or over; conventional indicators of population ageing that are based on chronological age (years since birth), with a fixed threshold of old age at age 65, show that populations are becoming older in all regions of the world" (9).

As the aged population keeps on increasing, a precise measurement of all dimensions of food insecurity of older people becomes more significant for programme and policy decisions.

5. Old-Age Dependency Ratio (OADR)

The old-age dependency ratio is about the number of aged people (aged 65 years and above) per 100 working age people (aged 20 to 64 years). This metric indicates the economic related dependency related to the growing proportion of older people. The available data indicate that the OADR has been increasing across all regions since the 1990s and the

phenomenon most likely to continue though the speed and level of this increase vary among regions. According to United Nations report, "Globally, there were 16 persons aged 65 years or over per 100 persons aged 20-64 years in 2019; in 2050, the global OADR is projected to increase to 28 older persons for every 100 working-age persons" (9). As OADR is increasing and projected to increase, there is a necessity to assess all dimensions of food insecurity among the older population to understand the level of food security related dependency among them and address their problems.

6. National Development and Sustainable Development Goals

Every nation should take adequate and appropriate actions to address food insecurity among senior citizens of their nations. If any nation is focusing on and taking adequate steps for economic development without adequately addressing the food insecurity of its senior citizens, the nation may attain development, but it will have more starving elderly citizens. Similarly, if nations take adequate steps to achieve sustainable development goals without addressing food insecurity among older people, the nations will never reach the goals because several goals are linked to the food security of older persons. For example, achieving goal number 1, "No Poverty - End poverty in all its forms everywhere" and goal number 2, "Zero Hunger - End hunger" can never be achieved without achieving food security for senior citizens. As attaining SDGs are impossible without addressing the food insecurity of elderly citizens, every nation has to assess all dimensions of food insecurity among older people to address them adequately and contribute to attaining SDGs.

7. Filial Responsibility

Filial piety, a traditional virtue espoused by religions and cultures in several nations, places the responsibility of supporting and caring for the elderly on either children or family members. However, changes in employment and family structure, migration, shifts towards consumerism, changing notions of family, increasing female participation in employment and enterprising, increase in the cost of living, lack of adequate affordable housing facilities in urban areas, lack of affordable health care facilities and changes in attitudes towards elderly people are the few factors which have weakened the filial responsibility. If filial responsibility is not realised and adhered, the problem of neglecting and marginalisation most likely happens to older members in the households which may negatively impact their food security, even though all other members of the household may have food security. There are several studies indicating a decline in filial piety. In China, there is general worry about the resilience of filial piety, particularly in the pace of economic modernisation (11-13). "Filial piety towards ancestors, grandparents, and parents, which used to be a pillar of Korean family relations, has weakened" (14). Recent decades have seen palpable decline

of family supports for older people in developing countries and these declines have exposed the aged to increasing poverty and deprivation. According to HelpAge International, "when families are scattered by migration or forced movement, their support cannot always be relied upon; with the decline in extended family networks, there are fewer relatives available to help older members who are in need" (15). "Family structures have been changing, as people are living longer and having fewer children, family structures are transformed and leaving older people with fewer options for care" (16). "Changing economic structure, increased mobility of people, changing attitudes and increasing number of dual-career families have led to an erosion of traditional values under which children held parents in high regards and considered as their sacred duty to care for elderly parents" (17).

As the traditional support system to elderly people has been declining, the government responsibility towards older people has increased. As government has to implement welfare programmes to enhance the food security of older people, assessing all dimensions of food insecurity of older people became a fundamental requirement for planning welfare programmes for elderly people.

8. Age-Related Discrimination and Abuse

The level of discrimination and abuse against elderly people is rising. Elder abuse and neglect are the results of age discrimination. The aged population is a large and vulnerable group suffering from high levels of physical, economical and social insecurity and increasingly vulnerable to abuse, neglect and discrimination. Age related discrimination and abuse can push older people to the stage of food insecurity. Compared with gender and racial discrimination, age discrimination is more common, about 10 percent higher than gender discrimination and twice as much as racial discrimination (18). Age discrimination is a ubiquitous phenomenon (19) that can affect older people in various life domains (20). Research studies in India also clearly indicated the prevalence of elderly abuse (21-23) and sons were predominant perpetrators of abuse and daughters-in-law were second largest perpetrators of abuse. (22, 24). Studies conducted by Helpage India and Achappa et al. Reported, "daughters-in-law as perpetrators in majority of cases" (25, 26). As age-related discrimination and abuse is increasing, the government has to implement statutory protections and welfare schemes to protect the right of older people, including right to have food without affecting dignity, and assessing all dimensions of food insecurity of older people can be a value-addition for planning and implementing these statutory protections and welfare schemes.

9. Inadequate Priority to address Food Insecurity among the Older Persons

The focus and priority of several governments and international organisations are

often related to economic development, climate change, migration and terrorism related issues, women development, reducing children mortality, national and household level food insecurity and sometimes children and women specific food insecurity, and their focus toward food insecurity of elderly people is inadequate. The available data are inadequate and not regularly updated to reveal the fact about food insecurity among aged people. So, assessing the level of food insecurity and all dimensions of food insecurity of aged people is necessary to highlight the plight of senior citizens. Assessing the dimensions of food insecurity of aged people can contribute to governments in planning and implementing policies and programmes to enhance the food security of older people.

10. Assessment based on Responses of Older People

Household food security status is often assessed based on the responses of the adult earning member of the household, generally the head of the household, and there are studies about food insecurity among older persons based on household members. To have better understanding about the food security status of older persons, older person are to be the respondents. The following are the few reasons for selecting older persons as respondents to assess food security status of older members.

The first reason is declining of filial responsibility. When the filial responsibility towards elderly members is accepted and adhered by family, the elderly members get the required level of support and care, including food. It is a known fact that the filial responsibility adhered generally by the Indian community, but the situation has been changing and filial responsibility has been eroding very fast and there are reports that family members failed to provide adequate support and care, including food, to elderly members in their families.

The second reason is about increasing discrimination, abuse and neglect in households. There are households becoming breeding place for elderly abuse and fail to provide adequate food to elderly members, and the elderly members often accept it as their destiny without raising their voice, and also because they believe that their voice is not going to be heard, and even if heard, the family is their final destiny to spend their last days. Though the elderly people who are having adequate economic resources through saving, pension, investment and assets can raise their voice and be assertive, but the poor and needy elderly persons who live purely based on the support of nonelderly family members often do not voluntarily share their problems, including their food insecurity situation, with others.

The third reason is about a few prevailing cultures and family system which often promotes disparities and inequality within the households and feeding the young male adult members, especially earning members, is often priority in the poor households. When the food insecurity related problem arises in the household, the first affected members of

the household are women and elderly members in the household.

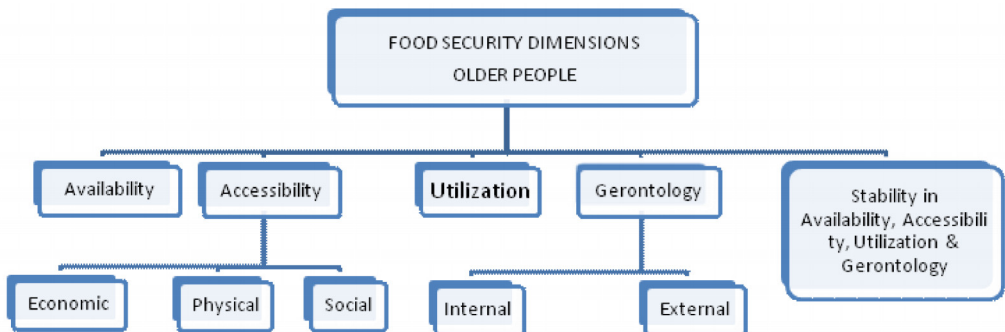
The fourth reason is about lack of awareness and information among adult earning members about the coping mechanism applied by other members, especially homemakers and aged members, of the households and the size of meal consumed and number of meals skipped by the women and elderly members in the households. Earning adult members often unaware about general coping mechanism such as travelling long distance to buy cheaper food and essential items instead of buying them in convenient nearby market, borrow cereals, oil, gas, etc. from neighbours, take loan from money lenders and self-help groups, buy food and other essential items on credit from local shop keepers, and borrow from friends and neighbours to manage the dietary needs of the household members.

The fifth reason is about the failure, unwillingness, or lack of awareness of household members to provide appropriate care and support, including food, to older members who are having Activities of Daily Living and Instrumental Activities of Daily Living related problems. So, assessing food insecurity status of older people based on the responses of older persons is a fundamental requirement for having adequate and accurate picture about food insecurity status among older people.

11. Gerontology Dimension and Measurement Tool

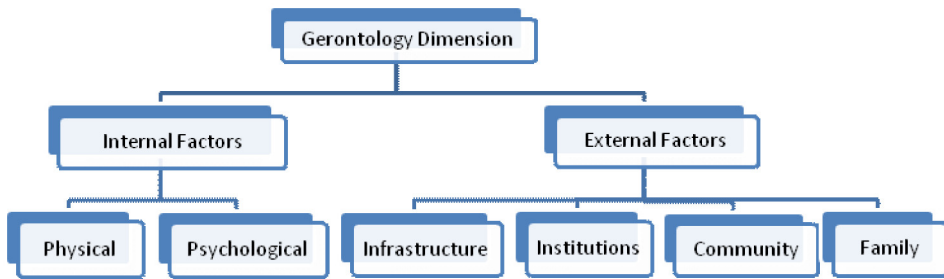
The experience-based measures of food security are more popular among both policymakers and researchers to assess food security among individuals and households. Food insecurity is generally addressed based on four dimensions which are availability, accessibility, utilization and stability, but the often used experience-based tools focus on economic accessibility (affordability) dimension, and they do not assess other dimension of food insecurity. So, there is a necessity to assess all dimensions of food insecurity, including gerontology related dimension, is a fundamental requirement to address food insecurity related problem of elderly people.

Figure 2: Dimensions of Food Security - Elders Perspective



When the food insecurity of the elderly population is assessed, a few specific aspects are to be measured which are additional to generally used tools to assess food insecurity among nonelderly individuals and households. As the additional components are exclusively related to elderly individuals, it can be called the gerontology dimension. The gerontology dimension can be broadly grouped into internal and external factors. The internal factors are related to physical and psychological problems of elderly people, which curtail their food security. Physical problems can push elderly people into food insecurity; for example, ADL (Activities of Daily Living) and IADL (Instrumental Activities of Daily Living) related problems. Psychological problems, depression is one among them, can hinder the food security of elderly people. External factors are infrastructure, institutions, community and household related problems which can curtail the food security of elderly people.

Figure 3: Additional Factors Influence Food Security of Elders



So, internal factors (physiological and psychological) and external factors (infrastructures, institution, community and family) are to be assessed along with other dimensions to have a clear picture about the dimensions of food insecurity among elderly people.

12. Conclusion

The diversity of sectors and disciplines for which food security is relevant often creates a barrier and great challenges to constructing a measurement tool to assess all dimensions of food insecurity, especially among elderly people. Approaches to programme development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and formulation of policy to protect and enhance the food security of older people are equally diverse and required an adequate tool to assess all dimensions of food insecurity. The often-used tools to assess the food security of households and the nonelderly are inadequate to measure all dimensions of food insecurity of elderly people. So, there is a need to select and employ metrics thoughtfully and systematically to assess all dimensions of food security among elderly people, which will help in planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating programmes and formulation of policy to address food insecurity of the elderly population. As food insecurity among elderly

people has additional complications because of factors exclusively related to elderly people, there is a necessity to have a separate dimension, the gerontology dimension to assess the unique factors.

Adequate welfare and non-welfare support for the elderly population is the need of the hour. Though there are several reasons to justify that assessing all dimensions of food insecurity of aged people and providing adequate and appropriate support to senior citizens is the responsibility of every government, the major factors which can be stated as most relevant are several nations have been failing to fulfil the basic dietary needs of aged people which is violation of human right by nations, every country in the world is experiencing growth in the size and proportion of older persons in their population, the old-age dependency ratio keeps on increasing, and national development and the Sustainable Development Goals cannot be achieved without adequately addressing the food insecurity of senior citizens. So, assessing all dimensions of food insecurity among older people is a fundamental requirement for implementing sustainable welfare programmes to enhance food security of aged people and statutory protections to make sure that the aged people meet their dietary needs with dignity.

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