

Children Torn Apart

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Malnutrition Destroying India's Youth

“Lying on the bed is a tiny malnourished child. Her limbs wasted, her stomach bloated, her hair thinning and falling out. Her name is Roshni. She stares, wide-eyed, blankly at the ceiling. Roshni is six months old and she should weigh 4.5kg. But when she is placed on a set of scales, they settle at just 2.9 kilograms. There are 40 beds in this centre. On every one is a similar child, and all are acutely malnourished; wailing, painful, and plaintive cries fill the air.” (Malnutrition Getting Worse in India)

Every day, thousands and thousands of innocent children, like Roshni, die on the streets due to malnutrition (USA Today). India, being the second most populous country, has now also become the second largest country for child malnutrition rates in the world, having over 45% of its children suffering from malnutrition (International Food Policy Research Institute). With an infant mortality rate of about thirty percent in India (CIA World Factbook), over a third of those deaths are caused by malnutrition alone (Mother and Child Nutrition). [Child malnutrition has become an increasing problem in India, caused by a variety of reasons such as corruption in food distribution and lack of money and education.](#) The effects of malnutrition on children are very dreadful, as it will dramatically impact their opportunities to a decent education and a well paid job (Saini). [Although, this sounds like a very difficult issue to resolve, there is definitely a way to eradicate child malnutrition from India.](#) All it requires is a bit more work from the government *and* from the people (Malnutrition Rampant May Trigger Crisis). [To better understand the solutions of this problem, we must first be aware of all the causes and the effects of child malnutrition today; only then can we work together and eradicate this issue from India.](#)

[Child malnutrition is still a persistent problem in India with a variety of root causes, including corruption in the food distribution, poverty, lack of education, and overpopulation.](#) About seventeen percent of India's total GDP is obtained from agriculture alone, as it employs about sixty percent of India's total labor force (CIA World Factbook). Therefore, even though India has a rapidly increasing population, there is still clearly enough food being produced for everyone to consume

(India's Undernourished Children). Moreover, food production in India *is* keeping up with India's rising population, but that food is *not* being distributed equally amongst the people, as one side of the society gets too much food, while the other lives off barely anything (India's Undernourished Children). In addition, the sixty percent of the people working on agricultural services starve as well because the land they farm on is not their own property (Saini). That area is mostly owned by wealthy land owners (Saini). So even though these people farm there, they have to give a portion of the money they earn to the land owners, including the food expenses for filling their own stomachs (Saini). **Subsequently, poverty rates in India are extremely high.** Although the GDP in India is at an amazing \$3.269 trillion, the GDP per capita is relatively low, compared to world standards (CIA World Factbook). The GDP per capita in India is only about \$2,800; whereas some people earn much more than this amount, while others live on barely twenty rupees a day (CIA World Factbook). **“Poverty results in lack of money, thus families, especially children, do not get enough nutritious foods” (Saini).** Therefore, the poorer people evidently do not have enough money to support their family with a decent, nutritious meal (Accelerating Progress towards Reducing Child Malnutrition in India). As a result, the children suffer the most, as they need these nutritious foods to help them grow, both physically and mentally (Saini). Hence, more children in India suffer from malnutrition. Furthermore, the literacy rate in India is currently only sixty-one percent, meaning the other twenty-nine percent of the people are illiterate, and therefore, they do not know much concerning health and nutrition (CIA World Factbook). These people tend to buy the cheaper, less nutritious foods, for they would not know what foods are best for their children and would also want to save as much money as possible (India: Undernourished Children: A Call for Reform and Action). **For instance, these people would rather buy a cheap packet of chips rather than some fresh fruits and vegetables. Lastly, India's overpopulation plays a vital role in the increase of child malnutrition in India.** According to the International Food Policy Research Institute, in 2000, the child malnutrition rate in India was about forty-seven percent, whereas now, in 2009, the child malnutrition rate is about forty-six

percent. In addition, this shows that the rate of child malnutrition has decreased in the past nine years, however, the *absolute number* of children suffering from malnutrition is actually increasing! This is because the child population is increasing at such a rapid rate, compared to the decreasing rate of child malnutrition (International Food Policy Research Institute). So even though the rate of child malnutrition is decreasing, the absolute number of children suffering from malnutrition is actually increasing (International Food Policy Research Institute)! **As a result, these causes lead to higher child malnutrition in India, and consequently, lead to dreadful side effects that harm the entire community.**

In order for us to resolve this issue in India, we must recognize how malnutrition is affecting these poor children and how it has made an impact on our society. According to the CIA World Factbook, the infant mortality rate in India is about thirty deaths per 1,000 live births, thirty-five percent of all these deaths caused by child malnutrition alone (India's Undernourished Children). Thus, **if we eradicate child malnutrition from India, we will be able to prevent almost 35% of all these child deaths, and the infant mortality rate in India will plummet. This shows the impact child malnutrition has made on our society in terms of mortality. Subsequently, “failing to deal effectively with the under nutrition problem in India has dire consequences for children’s development. It retards their physical growth and increases their susceptibility to diseases in childhood and adulthood” (India's Undernourished Children).** As this quote suggests, child malnutrition, not only impacts a child’s physical growth, but it also impacts the child mentally, as it lowers a child’s IQ points and increases a **“greater degree of behavioral problems and deficient social skills at school”** (UNESCO Bangkok). Consequently, as the malnourished children grow up, they tend to give birth to deformed babies, due to vitamin/mineral deficiencies (India Together). This ultimately affects the children’s education opportunities, and thus, their job opportunities, for they won’t be as skilled as someone who has had a better education (India’s Undernourished Children). **Plus, if that child doesn’t get a decent education and is not earning enough money, he or she would still not be able to**

buy a sufficient amount nutritious food, and therefore making malnutrition more severe. Lastly, according to the Diet and Nutrition Center, child malnutrition in India affects the children in the sense that they become more vulnerable to other diseases, for they lose an enormous amount of fat, making them weaker. For instance, they become more exposed to diseases such as anemia and scurvy, both causing horrific side effects such as anorexia, easy bruising, and slow healing of wounds (How Does Nutrition Affect a Child Development). As a result, these innocent children suffer terribly, since they don't even have the money for treatment (How Does Nutrition Affect a Child Development). "Moreover, in a country where under nutrition is so widespread, the consequences of malnourishment go well beyond the individual, affecting total labor productivity and economic growth" (India's Undernourished Children). From this statement, one may infer that not only does malnutrition almost tear down the children's lives, but it also leaves a bad mark on the society in terms of economy and productivity. This proves the fact that child malnutrition affects a child's future job opportunities and as a result the whole society loses out on a further economic growth. Thus, as child malnutrition becomes an increasing problem in India, its effects on the children are dreadful, for it will surely leave a mark on the Indian society.

Although this problem has had an awful effect of the children and the society, there are still several solutions at hand to eradicate child malnutrition from India. First of all, the government of India has many resources it can use to help raise awareness among the people about child malnutrition. According to Anu Saini, a professional nutrition doctor, the government could use the television and post commercials on it, educating the people about child malnutrition and what its effects can be on the children and the entire family, such as higher treatment costs and mental and physical developmental issues. Additionally, the commercials could also inform the people on how to prevent child malnutrition from occurring in the family, such as buying more nutritious foods and having a balanced diet. The television is excellent resource, for even some of the poorer families have a television, as runs on illegal electricity (Saini). This way, even the poorer, uneducated people

would understand the importance of nutrition and how vital it is to your well being. Plus, they would also know the consequences of child malnutrition within the family and how to prevent malnutrition from occurring. Recalling, the current literacy rate in India is only sixty-one percent (CIA World Factbook). As of this, Mrs. Saini also believes that the government should make school compulsory till at least the fifth grade, if not more. This way, the children would at last be able to get a decent education, which will certainly help them in the future, for they would know more about nutrition and how to live a better life in this developing country. It would also give these children more opportunities and thus, a better income in the future (Malnutrition getting worse in India). This would absolutely result in a decrease in the child malnutrition rates in India. Lastly, the government should run special food programs for children in villages; especially those suffering from child malnutrition (A Local Solution to Child Malnutrition). There are currently a few programs in India, providing food for the street children, but they are not that efficient, for the government can do so much more with what power they have (Nutritional Disorders). Mrs. Saini states that the government could send their people to the villages in India; one person per two villages and have that person study that area for a couple of months. Then once those people know the villages well, they would also know which children are more severely malnourished (Saini). From then on, the government could send daily rations of nutritious foods and water to that person, and he or she would know how to distribute those rations among the people, so that everyone attains the amount they deserve from that ration (Saini). This way the poorer children would be provided with at least one decent, nutritious meal everyday, and therefore, stepping away from malnutrition (Saini). Moreover, if we do not resolve this problem immediately, child malnutrition will get progressively worse, and in the future, this problem may be out of our control.

To address the problem of child malnutrition in India, we must understand what it brings to our community and its effects on the society. I believe that all it takes to resolve this issue in India is more effort from both the people and the government. The first thing we should do is raise

awareness among the people about this issue and all the negativity it brings along with it. “As long as people know that these poor children are suffering from malnutrition and they can help, the community will certainly do something about it, in order to save the children and help develop a pleasant atmosphere within the society” (Saini). Every person can make a difference in a problem like this, for whosoever helps may be able to save these poor children’s lives. If we all work towards solving this problem, together, we could end child malnutrition in India. If these poor children have the opportunities we do, such as a proper education and an adequate amount of food and money, not only would they be able to prevent malnutrition, but imagine the future, where every child could have hopes and dreams of their own. Together, we can turn those dreams into reality and eradicate child malnutrition in India.

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