

Peace and Improvement in Iraqi Childhood Nutrition

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Abstract

Background: Malnutrition is faulty and bad nutrition. It is a silent invisible emergency that can be easily prevented and managed. High prevalence rates of malnutrition were reported in Iraq since 1996 but started to decline after the change in regimen in 2003.

Objective: To demonstrate the negative effects of conflicts (wars, widespread violence ... etc.) on children growth.

Materials and Method: A review of data was done from MICS reports from 1996 till 2018. Under 5 years malnutrition trends were graphically presented.

Results: All malnutrition indicators rates (stunting, wasting, and underweight) in both their moderate and severe forms for under five years children were presented in graphs including north middle, and south regions of Iraq.

Conclusions: Peace is an essential element in preventing malnutrition. Wars and social strife are the main factors that precipitate it. Low prevalence rates of malnutrition reflect good health.

Keywords: Malnutrition, MICS, sanction, Iraq, under five children.

Introduction

Malnutrition is one of the main factors that has an impact on childhood morbidity and mortality. It is the outcome of many factors that are related to inadequate food intake, recurrent and severe infections, poor food quality, or combination of factors. ⁽¹⁾

Undernourished children are at high risk for poor socio-emotional development, impaired mental and physical growth, low IQ level, and high risk of recurrent diseases. The effects expand beyond adulthood life too where it has a considerable role in minimizing adults' productivity and social activities even adulthood life span will be affected enormously. ⁽²⁾⁽³⁾

Iraq was faced many life challenges i.e., wars, civil wars, economic sanctions, environmental changes, and geopolitical instability. ^{(4) (5)} The undernutrition indicators (stunting, wasting, and underweight) are greatly affected by these man- made disasters. ⁽⁶⁾ Many surveys had been carried out to assess the nutritional status of Iraqi children e.g., Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) ⁽⁷⁾, and Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis (CFSVA). ⁽⁸⁾ None of these surveys draw trends of these indicators over years. So, the aim of the study was to show the impact of geopolitical instability on Iraqi children nutritional status from the north to the south since 1996 till 2018.

Materials and Methods

A review of MICS reports (1996, 2000, 2006, 2010, 2018) was done to draw trends of malnutrition indicators and to show the impact of geopolitical instability on

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these indicators on children nutritional status from the north to the south.

Operational definitions:

Stunting: failure to reach linear growth potential due to suboptimal health and / or chronic inadequate food intake. It is the chronic form of malnutrition.

Wasting: recent weight loss due to acute severe illness or famine. It is the acute form of malnutrition.

Underweight: it represents general malnutrition, describes recent body proportion and linear growth; therefor, reflecting both stunting and wasting.

Moderate malnutrition: children with z score between -2SD and -3SD.

Severe malnutrition: children with z score below -3 SD. (9)

Instruments and tools:

In all MICS, the anthropometric measures were taken using electronic scale and a wooden board. Z distribution was used to identify the prevalence rates of malnutrition indicators (stunting, wasting, and underweight).

Results

Figure (1) shows trends of under 5 children malnutrition indicators in Kurdistan region, while figure (2) shows these trends in the middle and south of Iraq 1996-2018.

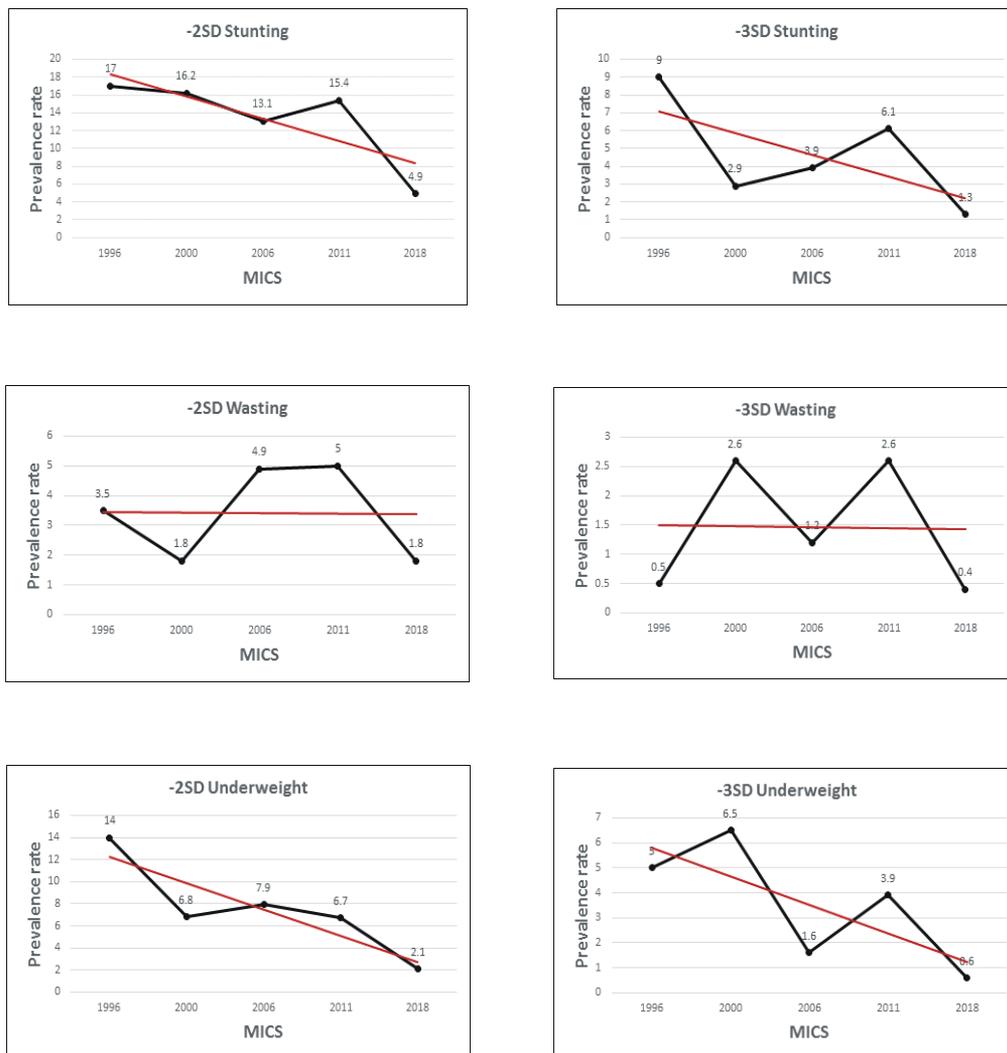


Figure (1): Trends of under 5 years children malnutrition indicators in Kurdistan region 1996- 2018.

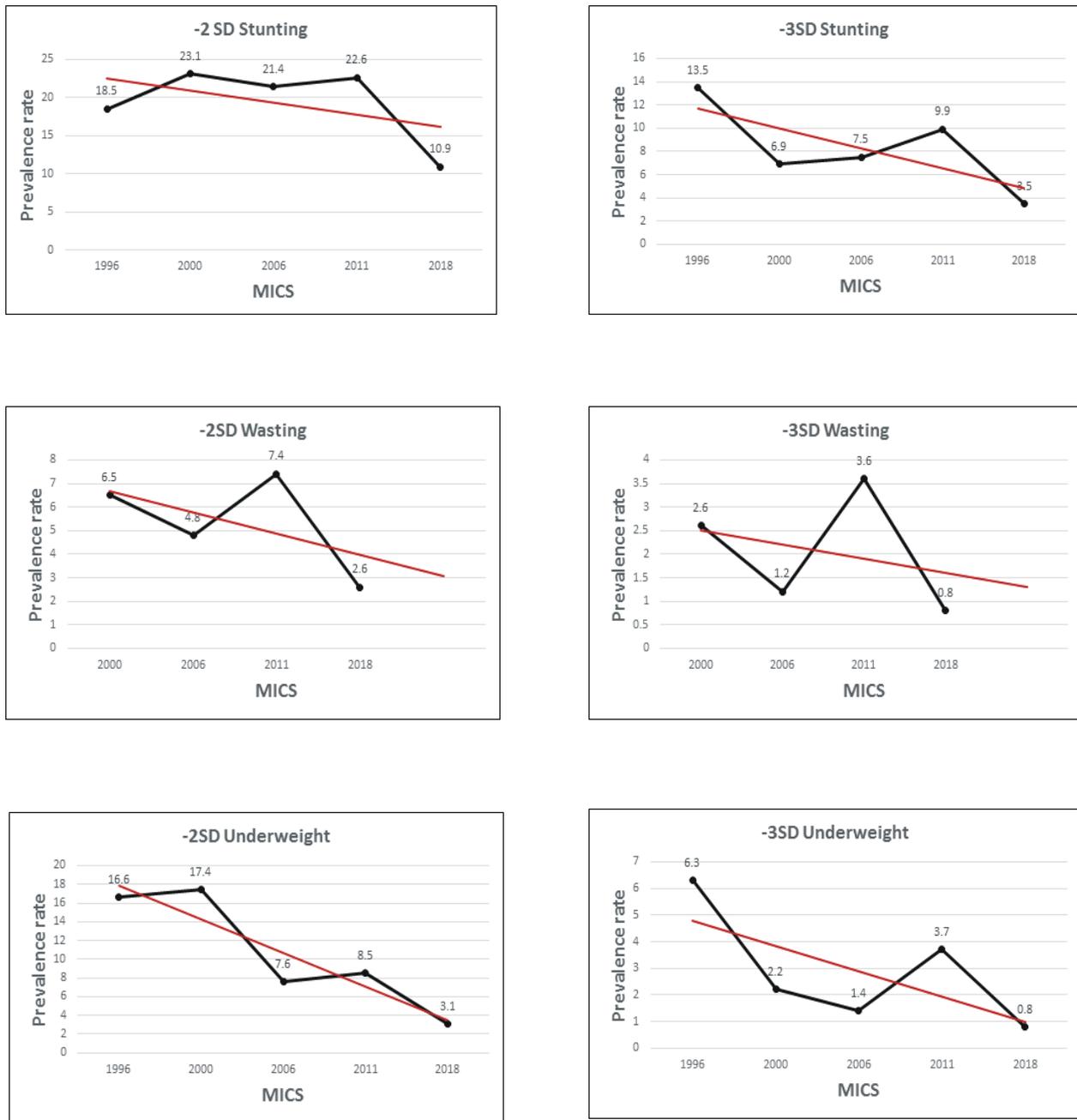


Figure (2): Trends of under 5 years children malnutrition indicators in the middle and south of Iraq 1996 – 2018.

Discussion

High rates of malnutrition indicators in MICS 1 (1996) might be explained by the fact of Iraq wars (1980-1988, and 1991) and economic sanctions. Several articles documented the effects of war on nutritional status of children. ⁽¹⁰⁾ MICS 1 showed definitely the effect of six years' sanctions. Because of these high rates, the Security Council was enforced to announce the

Oil For Food Programme (OFFP) on April 1995 which was 1st carried out on May 1997 as Memorandum Of Understanding (MOU). The effect of this memorandum was apparent in MICS 2 (2000), where all the indicators improved. Stunting is a chronic irreversible condition that needs time to get rid of sanction's effect. Besides, it is not related to childhood malnutrition only, it is greatly affected by maternal nutritional status too. MICS 3 (2006) reflected the change in regime and wealth

redistribution.

A peak in malnutrition indicators appeared in MICS 4 (2011). It might be due to financial crisis. A dramatic decline in malnutrition indicators was documented in MICS 6 (2018). Increase awareness about the importance of proper nutrition during pregnancy and early childhood, improved health services and easy access to health facilities, and availability of different food staff with different prices all aid in reduction of malnutrition indicators. This reduction reflects enhancement to good health.

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