Nutritional status of under-five children in poor rural areas of East Guinea-Bissau *

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Introduction

Since independence from Portugal in 1974, Guinea-Bissau has experienced considerable political and military disturbances, such as a civil war in 1998-1999 and several military coups (the latest in 2012), that have resulted in fragile post-conflict country, with a weak economy – marked by high unemployment, weak infrastructures and private sector - and, consequently, in a widespread poverty.

Poverty contributes to malnutrition and children, who are malnourished, are much more susceptible to infectious diseases.

Guinea-Bissau is one of the poorest countries in the world, ranking 178 out of 188 on the 2016 Human Development Index (HDI=0.424) with more than 90% of the population in or near of multidimensional poverty and 58% in a severe situation, where children and women are the most affected [1].

The data presented confirm that malnutrition is a major public health problem in the East region of Guinea-Bissau, so, an urgent intervention is needed in this region in order to minimize protein energy malnutrition.

Based on WHO criteria, the studied population showed worrying prevalence of malnutrition. Therefore, these under-five children are at a great risk for negative health consequences in a short- and long-term.

Results

General malnutrition was observed as follows: 27.8% of stunting, 21.0% of underweight and 10.8% of wasting. These values are higher than national ones [3, 4], reflecting a high prevalence of poverty and food and nutritional insecurity in these regions. No significant differences were found between sexes.

Wasting increased in the period of 2016 compared to 2014-15 and there is an overall increase in malnutrition with age, with differences statistically significant in relation to stunting (21.8% vs 31.3%, 0-23 and 24-59 months, respectively).

Maternal nutritional status and breastfeeding were the major factors associated with malnutrition among children. Children of malnourished mothers have a 2.2 and 1.8 times greater risk of suffering from acute malnutrition and underweight, respectively. Likewise, children who were breastfed for one year or less have a 2.4 times higher risk of being underweight for age.

Conclusions

Based on WHO criteria, the studied population showed worrying prevalence of malnutrition. Therefore, these under-five children are at a great risk for negative health consequences in a short- and long-term. The extent of food and nutritional insecurity, associated with poverty and poor conditions of sanitation, could be the main causes of the high prevalence of malnutrition observed in this region.

The data presented confirm that malnutrition is a major public health problem in the East region of Guinea-Bissau, so, an urgent intervention is needed in this region in order to minimize protein energy malnutrition.

References


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