

Hidden Hunger

Hidden hunger is a term that refers to a form of deficiency by eating food that is insufficient in vitamins and micronutrients.

Although monitored and understood, the issue of micronutrient deficiency often goes unnoticed, hence the coining of the term 'hidden hunger'.

This article will further elaborate on the the issue of hidden hunger within the context of the Civil Services Examination

What causes Hidden Hunger?

Usually the cause of hidden hunger is when people find it difficult to diversify their diets with sufficient amounts of nutritious food such as fruits, vegetables, pulses, meat etc. As such event communities which do have a regular food supply find themselves subjected to micronutrient deficiencies.

The most obvious effects of micronutrient deficiency are anemia or goitre. This helps in identifying the presence of hidden hunger. But further research is needed to determine how serious the problem is.

As per the data by the National Family Health Survey - V (NFHS-V) carried out in 2018-2019, About 57.2 per cent women in the age group of 15 to 49 years are anaemic, a rise from 49.7 per cent in NFHS-4. In urban areas, anaemia rates are slightly lower than rural areas.

What are the steps taken to mitigate the Hidden Hunger?

Hidden hunger can be addressed with the implementation of the following strategies

- Supplementation
- Fortification
- Diet diversification.

These strategies are considered by the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) as sufficient in meeting the nutritional requirements of the general population

1. Supplementation: A technical approach, supplementations deliver nutrients directly to the population through syrup or pills. Its main advantage is that it can supply the specific number of nutrients in a highly absorbable form.

It should be noted that supplementation is a short term method eventually replaced by food-based measures in order to increase food and nutrient diversity.

Supplementation programs in India are focused on providing iron to pregnant women and vitamin A to children under 5.

2. Food fortification

Food fortification is the addition of micronutrients in processed foods.

Enrichment and fortification are some of the methods used.

Enrichment restores lost nutrients during food processing, while in fortification, those nutrients are added which are not originally found in the food being processed.

Depending on the requirements, food fortifications is done to fulfill the following objectives

- Maintain nutritional quality of foods
- Prevent nutritional deficiencies in the population
- Provide technological functions in food processing

Food fortification plays a crucial role in enhancing nutritional improvement programmes and are considered as part of a hands-on approach to mitigate hidden hunger.

3. Diet Diversification

Through diet diversification the quantity and the range of micronutrients-rich foods can be increased. It requires different types of foods such as fruits, vegetables, pulses ,dairy products etc to be readily available and that too in appropriate quantities.

With diversity in diet, many food constituents like antioxidants, and probiotics can be taken, thus improving the nutrient intake of the population as such. Hence, diet diversification is the preferred method of combating hidden hunger.

Conclusion

Developing nations such as India not only have to contend with hidden hunger but also with problems like inadequate healthcare, insufficient education or abysmal sanitation. Thus focusing on a single micronutrient deficiency is not the most effective strategy.

For any strategy to be successful a full political commitment is required.

Frequently Asked Questions Related to Hidden Hunger

What is the best way to overcome hidden hunger?

The best way to overcome hidden hunger is to avoid eating junk food which is filling but low on nutrients and eat fortified foods with various micronutrients.

Which nutrients are lacking in cases of hidden hunger?

Iron, iodine and vitamin A are the nutrients which are lacking in most cases of hidden hunger