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The influence of socio-demographic variables on child food poverty



5th March 2024
National Convention Centre

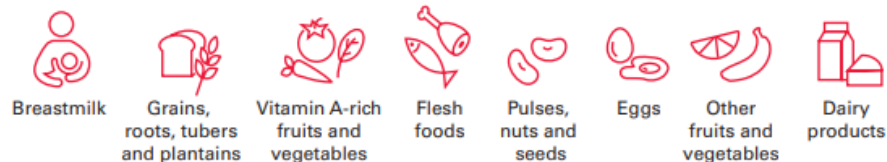
What is Child food poverty (CFP)?

CFP?

Children's inability to access and consume a minimum diverse diet in early childhood

To meet the minimum dietary diversity for healthy growth and development, children need to consume foods from **at least five out of the eight** recommended food groups.

The eight food groups are:



If children are fed:

0-2 food groups/day
they live in severe food poverty

3-4 food groups/day
they experience moderate food poverty

5 or more food groups/day
they meet the minimum dietary diversity

Research Topic

To assess the influence of socio-demographic variables on child food poverty in children under two (6 – 23 months)

Rationale for the research topic

- Globally, 1 in 3 children live in severe food poverty.
- In East Asia & the Pacific, 70 million children under 5 are experiencing food poverty, of which 20 million are suffering from severe food poverty.
- In South Asia, half of all children experiencing food poverty live in severe food poverty.
- Despite sincere efforts from the government of Lao PDR, the percentage of children meeting the minimum dietary diversity is on decline.
- The most recent Nutrition Sentinel Surveillance data allows us to look at the status of child food poverty in Lao PDR.

Research Methodology

The survey was carried out by UNICEF and WFP with funds from the European Union.

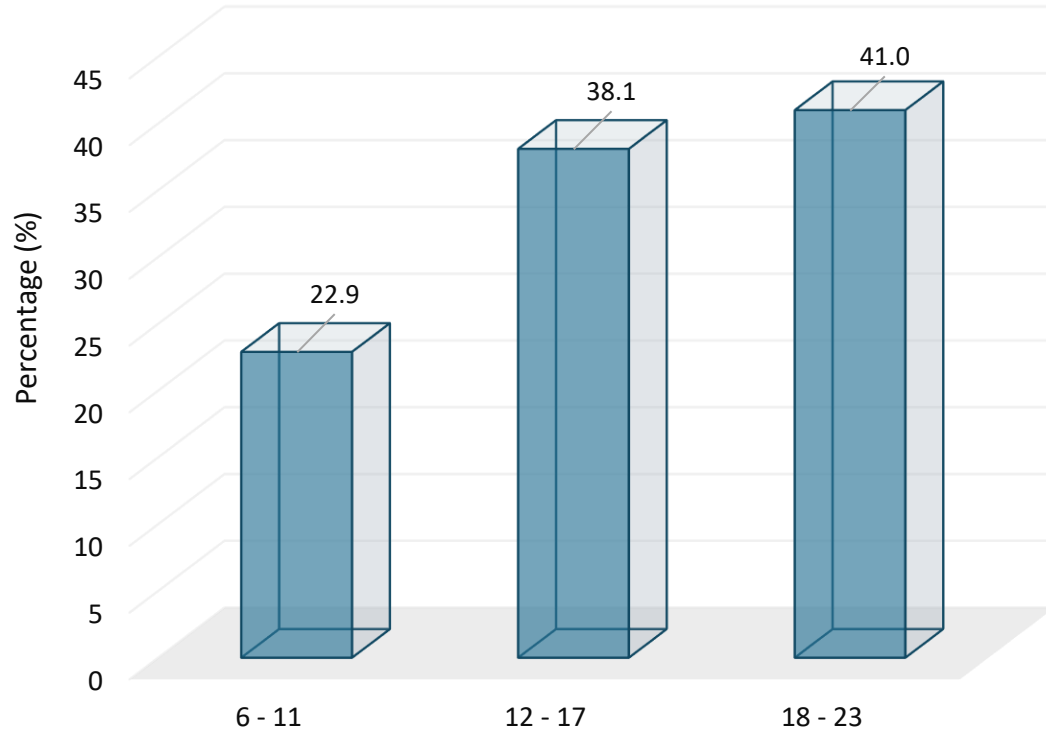
Descriptive and inferential analyses were carried out to infer the influence of the following socio-demographic variables on child food poverty:

- Region
- Family size
- Maternal education
- Maternal age
- Breastfeeding status
- Food consumption score (FCS)
- Consumption of ultra processed food (“junk”) food



Child food poverty (CFP)

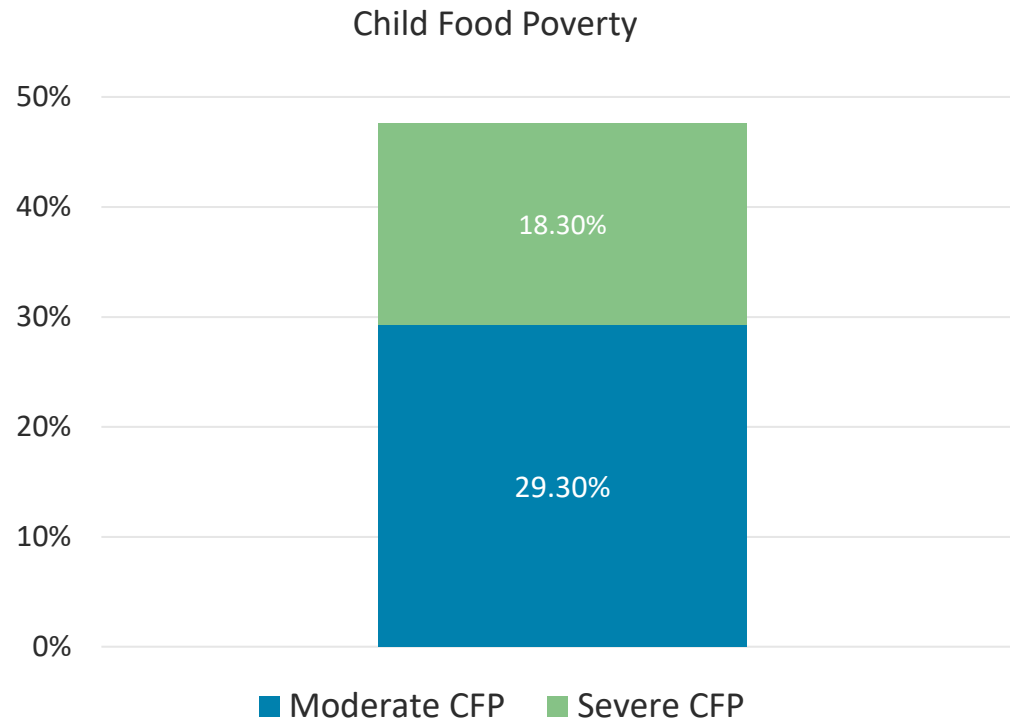
The context: Stunting in children under 2 years



Source: NSS October 2023

- Children living in severe food poverty are particularly vulnerable to severe stunting.
- The percentage of stunting increases with age.
- 41% children aged 18 – 23 months are stunted, compared to 23% children aged 6 – 11 months.

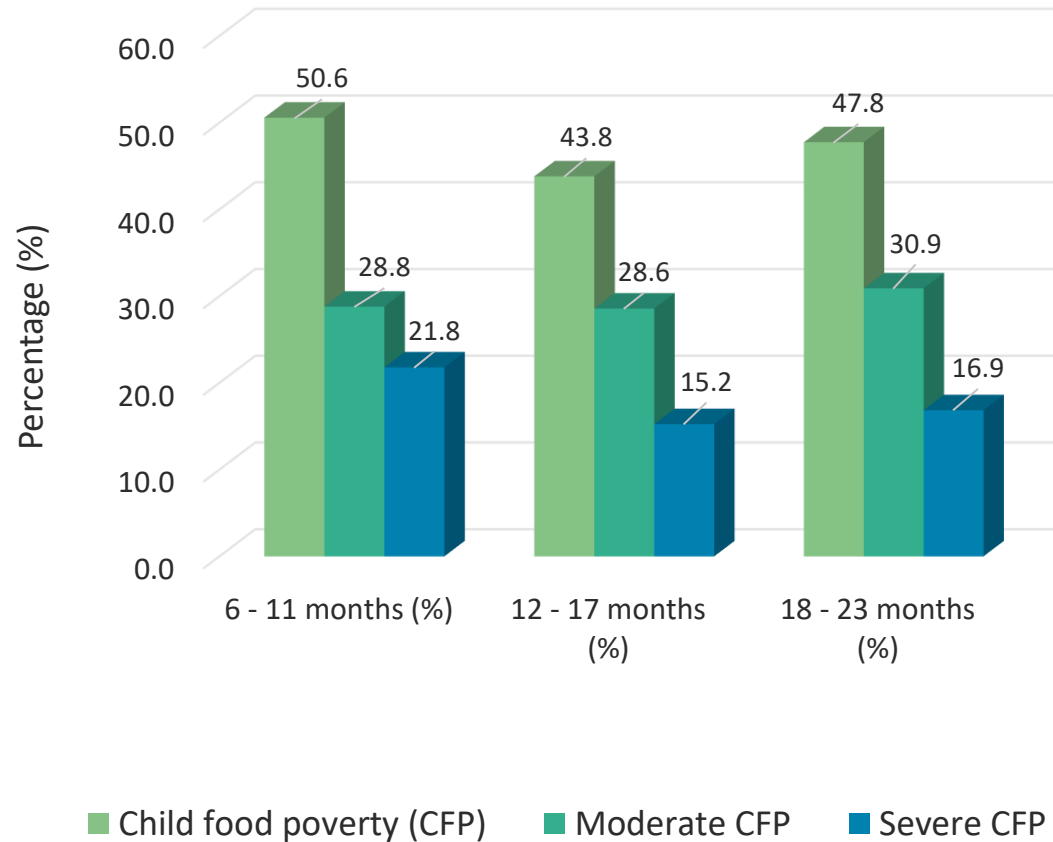
The context: CFP in children under 2 years



Source: NSS October 2023

- Despite post-harvest season, about 1 in 2 children are facing CFP.
- The consumption of Vitamin A rich fruits & vegetables, and legumes, nuts & seeds is low (54% - 28% respectively).

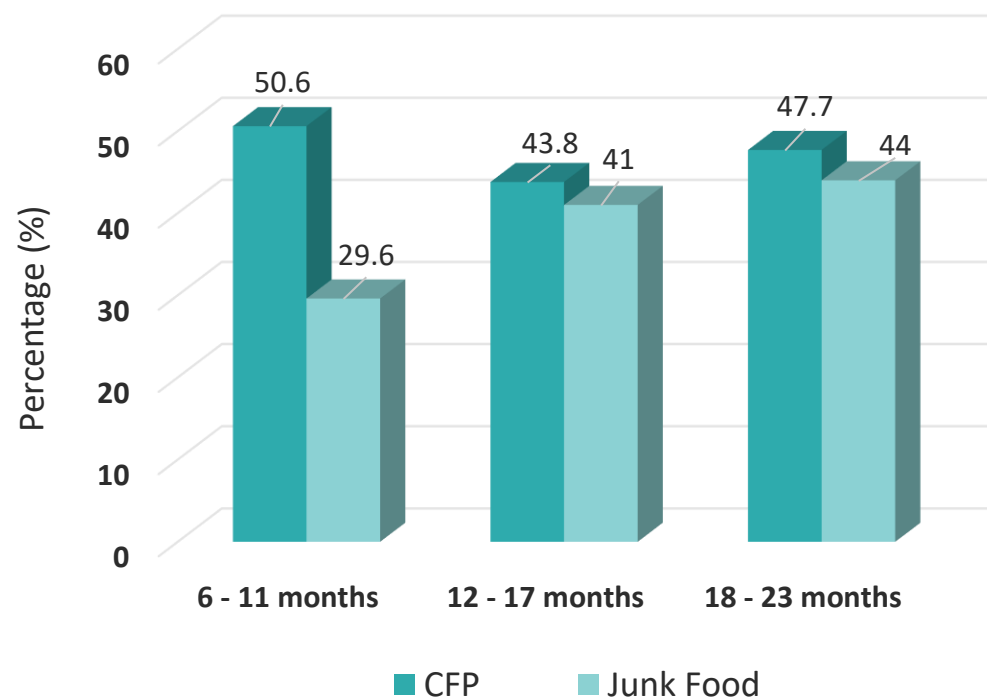
Severity of child food poverty by age group



Source: NSS October 2023

- The child food poverty and its severity is higher among children aged 6 – 11 months.
- A similar trend was found in child food poverty across all three regions.
- Feeding practices when incorporating complementary foods are affecting the quality of diets in infants.

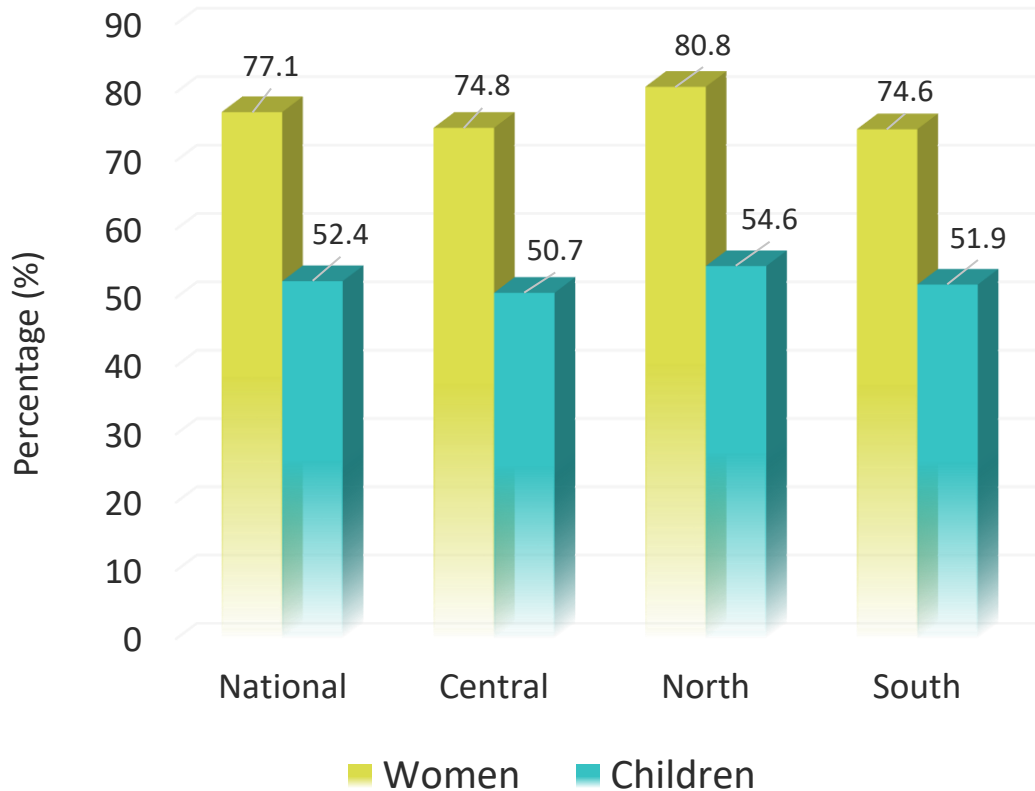
CFP and consumption of junk food



Source: NSS October 2023

- More than 1/3 of children U2 consume unhealthy (“junk”) food such as ultra-processed foods and sugary drinks.
- The consumption of junk food increases with age, almost half of children 18 – 23 months consume unhealthy foods.
- Families may be choosing to feed their children junk food instead of the recommended food groups, impacting on the diversity of their diets.

Women's MDD vs children's MDD



Source: NSS October 2023

- The percentage of children meeting the minimum dietary diversity is lower (52%) than that of women's (77%), and a similar trend is found in all regions.
- This could imply that in a same household foods are available for consumption (by women) but are not provided to children.

CFP and Food Consumption Score (FCS)

FCS	✓ CFP	✗ CFP
Acceptable	44.3	55.7
Not acceptable	73.0	27.0

73% children are experiencing child food poverty (CFP) in households with unacceptable food consumption compared with 44% in households with acceptable food consumption.

There is an association between poor food consumption with child poverty, however of note also that in households with acceptable food consumption still almost half (44%) of the children are experiencing food poverty.

Association between socio-demographic variables and CFP

Variables	CFP
Region	OR .96 (.78 - 1.17) Chi2 .77 (0.69) 
<=5 household size	OR 1.27 (.93 - 1.73) Chi2 2.29 (0.13) 
Maternal age	OR .91 (.72 - 1.15) Chi2 2.74 (0.43) 

There is no significant association of CFP across regions, household size and maternal age.

*Significant (P <0.05)

Association between socio-demographic variables and CFP

Variables	CFP
Maternal education	OR .64 (.53 - .77) Chi2 21.6 (0.00)
Continued breastfeeding	OR 1.53 (1.10 - 2.13) Chi2 6.42 (0.01)
Household food consumption Score	OR .29 (.17 - .51) Chi2 21.58 (0.00)

Association

Association

Association

- **CFP is significantly less** in children from mothers with post-secondary education.
- **CFP is significantly less** in children which are on **continue breastfeeding** between 1 and 2 years.
- **CFP is significantly less** in children from households with **acceptable food consumption**.

Conclusion

- Despite seasonal fluctuations, **child food poverty persists**, affecting approximately half of children aged 6-23 months, indicating ongoing nutritional challenges.
- **Low consumption** of essential nutrients such as Vitamin A-rich fruits & vegetables and legumes, nuts & seeds highlights deficiencies in children's diets, necessitating targeted interventions to improve nutritional diversity.
- Disparities in **dietary diversity between children and women** within households suggest a need for enhanced awareness and practices regarding appropriate feeding for infants and young children.
- **Maternal education and prolonged breastfeeding** show protective effects against child food poverty, underscoring the importance of education and breastfeeding support in addressing nutritional deficiencies.
- **Household food consumption scores (FCS)** significantly influence the prevalence of child food poverty, emphasizing the critical role of family-level interventions in improving overall nutritional outcomes for young children.

Research limitations

- Cross-sectional nature – Study relied on cross-sectional data of surveillance limits the ability to establish casual relationships between socio-demographic factors and child food poverty.
- Seasonal variation – The surveillance data collected during post-harvest season (Oct-Nov 2023) might introduce bias in child food poverty, as food availability and consumption patterns can vary throughout the year.
- Maternal reporting – Data collected on children's food consumption solely through the 24-hour food recall by mothers and there could be recall bias.

Key policy recommendations

- Elevate the elimination of child food poverty – particularly severe– to a national development priority and ensure aligned support through policy, legislation, budgets and services across all sectors.
- **For the health system:**
 - Improve caregivers access to nutrition counselling and enforce national standards to protect young children from unhealthy foods and marketing practices.
- **For the food system:**
 - Implement behavior change interventions to promote the consumption of diverse diets, specifically focusing on the foods less consumed (vit A rich fruits & vegs, legumes, nuts & seeds).

Key policy recommendations

➤ For the social protection system:

- Promote the establishment of workplace/ community-based systems to support mothers to take care of children U2, especially working mothers.
- Use social protection programs to promote better child feeding practices through education and counselling.

➤ For the education system:

- Prioritize investments targeting strategies for school retention for girls.
- Incorporate nutrition education in schools.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH

