Determinants of Child Nutritional Inequalities in Pakistan: Regression-Based Decomposition Analysis

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Abstract : Globally, the dilemma of undernutrition has become a notable concern for the researchers, academicians, and policymakers because of its severe consequences for many centuries. The nutritional deficiencies create hurdles for the people to achieve goals related to live a better lifestyle. Not only at micro level but also at the macro level, the consequences of undernutrition affect the economic progress of the country. The initial five years of a child's life are considered critical for the physical growth and brain development. In this regard, children require special care and good quality food (nutrient intake) to fulfill their nutritional demand of the growing body. Having the sensitive stature and health, children specially under the age of 5 years are more vulnerable to the poor economic, housing, environmental and other social conditions. Beside confronting economic challenges and political upheavals, Pakistan is also going through from a rough patch in the context of social development. Majority of the children are facing serious health problems in the absence of required nutrition. The complexity of this issue is getting severe day by day and specially children are left behind with different type of immune problems and vitamins and mineral deficiencies. It is noted that children from the well-off background are less likely affected by the undernutrition. In order to underline this issue, the present study aims to highlight the existing nutritional inequalities among the children of under five years in Pakistan. Moreover, this study strives to decompose those factors that severely affect the existing nutritional inequality and standing in the queue to capture the consideration of concerned authorities. Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey 2012-13 was employed to assess the relevant indicators of undernutrition such as stunting, wasting, underweight and associated socioeconomic factors. The objectives were executed through the utilization of the relevant empirical techniques. Concentration indices were constructed to measure the nutritional inequalities by utilizing three measures of undernutrition; stunting, wasting and underweight. In addition to it, the decomposition analysis following the logistic regression was made to unfold the determinants that severely affect the nutritional inequalities. The negative values of concentration indices illustrate that children from the marginalized background are affected by the undernutrition more than their counterparts who belong from rich households. Furthermore, the result of decomposition analysis indicates that child age, size of a child at birth, wealth index, household size, parents' education, mother's health and place of residence are the most contributing factors in the prevalence of existing nutritional inequalities. Considering the result of the study, it is suggested to the policymakers to design policies in a way so that the health sector of Pakistan can stimulate in a productive manner. Increasing the number of effective health awareness programs for mothers would create a notable difference. Moreover, the education of the parents must be concerned by the policymakers as it has a significant association with the present research in terms of eradicating the nutritional inequalities among children.

Keywords : concentration index, decomposition analysis, inequalities, undernutrition, Pakistan