SA3 - Health

The case of malnutrition in refugees

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Introduction

Throughout human history, malnutrition has been an extremely serious issue affecting particularly the population aged under five years. It is estimated that half of the under-five-year old deaths are related to malnutrition. Malnutrition is mainly a consequence of poverty and can be seen more commonly in areas with poverty, which is why it is observed in the protracted refugee situations. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is well aware of the ongoing issue of malnutrition among refugees and is coordinating missions regarding the issue. However, UNHCR was rather concerned about the subsequent reports over high malnutrition rates, especially among refugee women and children. The reports showed UNHCR that the continuing efforts in the provision of food, were unsuccessful in many operations throughout the world. Although these efforts aimed to meet all of the refugees’ daily nutritional needs (including micronutrient and macronutrient requirements), another approach was needed. As a result, a UNHCR/WHP session on malnutrition was held in October 2005 where the concerning trends and consequences were deliberated upon in-depth. Many governments and Non-governmental organizations such as United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and UNHCR are organizing operations on this vital issue.
Definition of Key Terms

**Protracted Refugee Situations (PRS):** Protracted Refugee Situations (PRS), defined by the UNHCR as a situation where refugees “…continue to be in exile for 5 years or more after their initial displacement, without immediate prospects for (the) implementation of durable solutions,” have developed into a pressing issue.

**Nutrients:** Organic nutrients consist of carbohydrates, fats, proteins and vitamins. These building blocks are vital for a human being’s life.

**Malnutrition:** Malnutrition is a health condition in which, the nutrients in the diet are either not enough or are too much that the diet causes health problems.

**Micronutrient Deficiencies:** Micronutrient deficiency is a lack of essential vitamins and minerals required in small amounts by the body for proper growth and development.
**Refugee:** A person or a group of people who have been forced to leave their country in order to escape war, persecution, or natural disaster. These people often live in harsh situations and many of them die due to hard conditions.

**Under-five Deaths:** The listed deaths of children under five years old. Since a children body is much less resistant to tough conditions than an average adult’s body, the average death rate of under-five refugees is much higher than the average death rate of adult refugees.

**General Overview**

After League of Nations got dismantled and United Nations (UN) was established, the international committee was well aware of the ongoing refugee crisis following the World War II. In 1947, the International Refugee Organization (IRO) was founded by the United Nations. The IRO was the first international agency to deal with the refugee issues. However, IRO didn’t prove to be permanent after it fell out of favor in 1949. At this time, UN was highly in need of a program with emphasis on all of the refugee problems and in the United Nations General Assembly of December 1949, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was established. When UNHCR was first established, their main objective was to resettle the refugees as soon as possible to inhibit the possibility of the situation getting protracted. However, the 21st century has had some major refugee crises mainly in Africa and the Middle East and Asia. UNHCR didn’t have enough resources to resettle all of these refugees. Thus, they started a new program with cooperation from World Food Programme (WFP) where they implemented multi-storey gardens (MSG) throughout North America to improve food security. As of 2011, UNHCR is currently working on the issue of Syrian Refugees and providing them with nutrients with the help of the (WHP). In 2013 UNHCR sent $1.4 billion dollars of aid for the aid demand inside Syria (the Syria Humanitarian Assistance Response Plan). The main reason of malnutrition in refugees is that the situations can last years. As long as refugees can’t find proper shelters these malnutrition situations will continue happening and get worse and worse as time progresses. That’s why malnutrition is seen more in protracted situations and should be tackled before the situation falls out of hand.
Major Parties Involved and Their Views

**United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR):** United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) also known as the UN Refugee Agency, is a United Nations based agency which aims to protect and support refugees. In 2006 UNHCR announced their partnership with WFP on tackling the issue of malnutrition on refugees.

**World Food Programme (WFP):** World Food Programme (WFP) is the food-assistance branch of the United Nations and world’s largest humanitarian organization tackling hunger and promoting food security. WFP partners with UNHCR to address malnutrition issues on refugees.

**Syria:** A massive refugee crisis is present in Syria because of an outgoing war. More than 6 million people are displaced as of 2017 and many of these refugees die each day due to reasons such as hunger and micronutrient deficiencies. According to the UNICEF more than 60 percent of these deaths are under-five deaths.
Turkey: Turkey is currently one of the biggest receiver of Syrian refugees with a refugee count of 3.4 million people as of 2017. However, many of these refugee’s experience malnutrition issues even though many NGOs are currently coordinating programs regarding Syrian refugees in Turkey.

United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF): United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) is also very active regarding the issue of Syrian refugees. They currently have a program which aims to tackle the malnutrition issue in child refugees as well as to send the child refugees to school.

Canada: Canada is one of the few countries from the western block which accepts refugees and set up asylums for refugees who are in need of secure food and a safe place to live. As of 2017, Canada currently has more than quarter of a million refugees inside their borders.

Timeline of Events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of Event</th>
<th>Description of Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1949</td>
<td>United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was established.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>1951 Convention relating to the status of Refugees</td>
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<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees</td>
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<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>The international Symposium, ‘Responding to the Nutrition Crisis Among Refugees: The Need for New Approaches’</td>
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<td>2006</td>
<td>UNHCR and WFP partner up to tackle the issue of malnutrition in refugees</td>
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<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Syrian crisis begins with many civilians fleeing their own country because of the war</td>
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<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>UNHCR sent $1.4 billion for the aid response inside Syria (the Syria Humanitarian Assistance Response Plan)</td>
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Treaties and Events

1948 Universal Declaration of the Human Rights: The Refugee Convention was based on Article 14 of this document. It was the first official treaty regarding refugees and is a sign that refugees started to become a major problem as of World War II.

1951 Refugee Convention: Is the key legal document regarding refugees. It defines the term “refugee” and outlines the rights of displaced as well as protects them.

The 1967 Protocol: Removed any and all time limits and added “without any geographic limitation” to the term refugee. Gave more rights to refugees and generalized the term “refugee”.

Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

As of July 1st, 2013, there were 145 parties to the 1951 Refugee Convention and 146 to the 1967 Protocol. Even though many powerful countries such as US and UK are members to both 1951 Convention and the Protocol, not many countries are acting upon the issue. They just recognize the term “refugee” but don’t take any actions and many countries just allow a small number of refugees in their boarders. In fact, most of the help and funding to refugees come from NGOs such as UNHCR, WFP and UNICEF. If there were more action taken from governments, the issue could be solved more easily as well as refugee deaths due to hunger and malnutrition would decrease massively.

Possible Solutions

First of all, search for your country’s policy regarding refugees. Check if there are citizens that flee from your country because of a chaos inside your boarders. If so, think about how you can inhibit that from happening. Check if there are any NGOs organizing programs regarding malnutrition among refugees inside your country’s borders. Be sure to create awareness about the issue so that NGOs can collect more donations for the refugees. There are many countries in which, programs are coordinated in order to raise money and create awareness so be sure to support and promote these organizations. Also keep in mind that the main reason why this issue is massive is because not many countries are acting upon the issue so make sure to encourage other countries to step up as well.

Bibliography


