

Erin Hilker, Student Participant  
Colfax-Mingo High School, Iowa

## Poverty Has A Direct Effect On The Paradox Of Hunger And Obesity In India.

The paradox of hunger and obesity is the most perplexing problem facing humanity. How an urban population can consume the delicacies that prosperity offers while the rural population faces starvation in a poverty-stricken life is a tough problem to face. This problem, however, is faced by many nations and its presence in nations considered prosperous is commonplace.

Take, for example, that a developing nation struggling to make its economic power known, whose citizens work tirelessly to bring prosperity upon themselves, is finally rewarded. What's the reward? The reward is a wealthy first class, a numerous and thriving middle class, and the paradox of hunger and obesity.

This is the horrible problem facing the leaders of India. India is now seen as having a stable, thriving economy and as being a strong military power. The increase of wealth in the middle class has been great as middle class citizens delve into the riches that the world economy has to offer. This increase of wealth in the middle class has created a large gap between middle class and the lower class.

About one fourth of Asia's population and one third of India's population live in poverty. Poverty is defined as surviving on one dollar or less per day. An average family living in poverty will spend about seventy percent of their income on food whereas an average American family will spend about ten percent of their income on food.

In India's booming economy fast food restaurants have found their niche: providing convenient and inexpensive meals for people on the go. But it has come with a price. Wheat and rice have been refined and are slowly becoming the staple grain. Refined wheat and rice have less fiber content and contain less vitamin B-complex, zinc, and chromium. Fast foods also contain more fats, salts, and sugars, which are responsible for causing obesity in many people. Obesity is defined as being extremely overweight. In fact, one third of all males and one half of all females in the upper middle class are considered to be obese. These statistics have led India to be the first developing nation put on a world wide list to reduce obesity.

The number of people living in urban areas is increasing because there are better jobs. As a result the per capita income for families is increasing. With more money they can afford to buy more and better quality food. The circulation of money helps stimulate the economy and vendors can afford to lower their prices, which makes the goods available to more people. This has increased the number of calories and other nutrients consumed by each person. Since foods that are indigenous to the region and others that grow abundantly are more available, they cost less and poorer people buy and eat more of them. Consuming too much of a single nutrient can cause a form of malnutrition. However, this is not always the case. Sometimes foods plentiful in India are scarce in other parts of the world so foreign countries will pay more for them. Thus the farmers export their harvests for a bigger profit, causing the poor to go hungry.

Hunger is a type of malnourishment in which the sufferer does not consume enough calories and protein to meet the nutritional needs of their body. Obesity is also a type of malnourishment in which too many fats and salts are consumed. The most common type of malnourishment in children that is responsible for the most deaths is iron deficiency anemia. This is associated with poor growth and development and learning disabilities. Studies show that more male children are affected than female

children. To avoid iron deficiency anemia in young children they should be breast fed as infants and then continued on a diet which includes iron and other essential nutrients such as vitamin A, vitamin C, and calcium. Muscles absorb iron better with the presence of vitamin C. Another type of malnourishment commonly afflicting children is diarrhea and such related ailments as dehydration. Diarrhea is caused by a lack of fiber. Consequently, too much fiber causes constipation, which can cause abdominal pain. Other types of malnourishment include: vitamin A deficiency, iodine deficiency, zinc deficiency, and iron deficiency. Common problems related to obesity are coronary heart disease and diabetes. Obesity is more common among the urban population where people have desk jobs instead of jobs requiring manual labor, like in factories or on farms.

The underlying cause of hunger is poverty. Poor people simply cannot afford to purchase food. It is the law of supply and demand that determines the prices of food. They can only buy what is in surplus. Sometimes when poor rural farmers cannot afford to buy food, they plant and harvest enough to sustain their family throughout the winter. Poor urban workers do not have the option of growing their own food. They must try to find a job to earn enough money to sustain the needs of their family.

The lack of money means that they are unable to buy a variety of food, which can lead to many nutritional deficiencies. When the body is malnourished it is unable to fight off diseases as well, and therefore, people with nutritional deficiencies are more likely to become ill. Because they have very little money the poor cannot afford to visit a doctor when they become ill. A family may be able to scrounge up the money to go to the hospital if the father is sick because he is in charge of the family.

This leaves people more susceptible to common diseases such as cholera, typhoid, and influenza, which they contract through unsanitary drinking water. To remain healthy, people must consume a variety of foods to get all the nutrients essential to maintain a healthy body. To get these nutrients, fresh vegetables, salt, meat, milk, and fish should be incorporated into the diet. The fish should be consumed whole because the vitamin A is in their eyes and the calcium is in their bones. Legume pulses and any greens from the garden that are edible also help provide these important nutrients. Another key factor in staying healthy is having clean water available to drink, cook with, and bathe in. Most rural people prefer to use water from rivers and rain. This has suited them for centuries, but now there are chemical treatments from crops running into the rivers and polluting the water. Also, pollution from car exhaust and other industrial complexes are contaminating the rain water, making it unsafe for drinking.

India is the second most populous country with about one billion people living in 1.2 million square miles. With an increasing middle class, India has started to make a name for its self in the world market exporting agricultural products, precious gems and jewelry, software services and technology, engineering goods, chemicals, and leather products. The life expectancy is sixty-three years for men and sixty-five years for women. Even though women have a longer life expectancy they are more prone to malnutrition related diseases because many women do not receive the extra nutrients they need during pregnancy. Another factor is that during food shortages the women often times give up portions of their meals to their husbands who labor in the fields all day.

Most Indians are Hindus or Buddhists and are forbidden by their religion to eat meat. Since they are vegetarians, and have thriving cattle herds, they depend on dairy products for protein. When there is a drought and food supplies for cattle become scarce, it hinders milk production and makes dairy products less available. This causes the prices of dairy products to increase, making the most important source of protein unobtainable to most poverty stricken families.

Most of the lower class continues to live in poverty. It is these people who do not have high paying jobs. They do not have high paying jobs because they did not receive an education. Some of India's main exports are in the field of science and technology, most of which require a college education.

This is why receiving an education is imperative to helping people out of the poverty level and into a normal standard of living.

Studies have shown that in regions where education plays an important role there are fewer people that are malnourished. However, the majority of the uneducated are women and they are the ones who raise the children. Well educated women will know how to care for themselves and their children during pregnancy. A well educated mother will feed her children a well balanced diet and teach them the importance of healthy eating habits. More people who live in urban areas have access to schools. It is better educated people who receive higher paying jobs and can thus afford a variety of foods. It is the uneducated rural farmers who are suffering from poverty. Not only would children have to walk several miles every day to attend school, but then the family would be short handed at the farm. That is an undesirable situation considering their crops are the family's only source of an income. Since they are poor they cannot afford modern farming equipment and often use oxen to plow their fields. Because of this seemingly primitive method of farming, these families are unable to reap a plentiful harvest. They stand no chance with an international trading market so they seek to sell their crops locally.

The Indian government along with the help of world organizations has been fighting the war against poverty. One plan became known as The White Revolution. It helped India's milk production, as it now supplies seventy percent of the world's milk. It made sure small family farms could afford a cow of their own to supply them with fresh milk. Having milk available to drink will help young children grow up strong and healthy. The Indian government is also trying to make school affordable and available to everyone. To eliminate the problem of obesity schools will teach students the importance of eating healthy and have physical education classes to students the importance of physical activity. Having educated citizens will help India's economy. Also, various organizations are helping provide affordable health care to every man, woman, and child. This will ensure a safe future for India.

In my opinion, the best way to achieve the goal of eradicating poverty in India is to make sure every one receives an education. This will help because some of India's main exports are in the field of science and technology, most of which require a college education and have excellent pay. Farmers should also be taught the latest agricultural techniques and advancements. This is how farmers can produce more crops for more profit. This is why receiving an education is imperative to helping people out of the poverty level and into a normal standard of living. Equally important is to make sure food and medical needs are met so people can live a long and healthy life. Every child deserves an equal chance at life. We need to help them by teaching them how to help themselves.

### Bibliography

Children's Nutrition Guide. 28 May 2005. 7 Sept. 2005.  
<<http://www.keepkidshealthy.com/infant/infantnutrition.html>>

Pimentel, David and Maria Pimentel. Editorial: Feeding the World's Population. May 2000. American Institute of Biological Sciences. 1 Sept. 2005. <[http://www.aibs.org/bioscience-editorials/editorial\\_2000\\_05.html](http://www.aibs.org/bioscience-editorials/editorial_2000_05.html)>

The State of Food Insecurity in the World. 2004. FAO Corporate Document Repository. 1 Sept. 2005.  
<[http://www.fao.org/documents/show\\_cdr.asp?url\\_file=/docrep/007/y5650e/y5650e00.htm](http://www.fao.org/documents/show_cdr.asp?url_file=/docrep/007/y5650e/y5650e00.htm)>

Addressing World Hunger, Malnutrition, and Food Insecurity. American Dietetic Association. 1 Sept. 2005. <[http://www.eatright.org/Public/Other/index\\_aworldhunger.cfm](http://www.eatright.org/Public/Other/index_aworldhunger.cfm)>

Fighting Poverty in Asia and the Pacific. 30 Aug. 2005. Asian Development Bank. 7 Sept. 2005. <[http://www.adb.org/Documents/Policies/Poverty\\_Reduction/default.asp](http://www.adb.org/Documents/Policies/Poverty_Reduction/default.asp)>

