FOOD SECURITY FOR EQUITABLE FUTURES

Project Newsletter

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FoodInsecurity, India, Ethiopia, Peru, Vietnam

PROJECT FINDINGS PRESENTED AT THE AMERICAN SOCIOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION ANNUAL MEETING

At the American Sociological Association's 117th Annual Meeting, project post-doctoral research associate Dr. Thomas Argaw presented a paper titled "Children's educational outcomes and persistence and severity of food insecurity in India: Longitudinal evidence from Young Lives". Based on 2009, 2012, and 2016 from the Young Lives survey data for India, the study examined whether severe and persistent food insecurity were associated with children's educational outcomes. These educational outcomes, measured when children were aged 8, 12, and 15, included test scores on the Peabody Picture Vocabulary test (PPVT) and a maths test, as well as years of education completed. The study found that both more persistent and more severe food insecurity were linked to lower test scores and fewer years of education completed. In addition, the study also showed that food insecurity generally declined between 2009 and 2016 among households in the study, though there was a slight increase between 2013 and 2016.

Dr. Argaw's full presentation is available on our YouTube channel here: **https://youtu.be/BMLNg8-6L9Q**

EXPERT INTERVIEW SERIES

As part of our efforts to increase public accessibility to the project, we are conducting short interviews with key stakeholders as part of our Expert Interview Series. The interviews are intended to be accessible to a general audience. Usually, a member of our research team remotely conducts the interview and the recordings are shared via our YouTube channel and project website. We have so far conducted five interviews for the series with experts from Vietnam, Ethiopia, Peru and India. The interviews discussed *the complex nature of food security, its links to social inequality, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on this issues, and the measures that need to be taken to address this serious issue*. We aim to conduct two to three such interviews per quarter. The interviews can be accessed via the link below: **https://www.youtube.com/@food_equity**

NEW TEAM MEMBERS

We are thrilled to welcome our three new post-doctoral research associates: Drs. Ankita Rathi, Charumita Vasudev, and Swayamshree Mishra (pictured below) to the team! Collectively the three form the core of the project's qualitative component and each of them brings valuable skills to the team (detailed below):

Ankita is a social science researcher from India. Her research is on issues at the intersection of the state's rural-urban development strategy, agrarian socio-political changes, and its link to ongoing socio-ecological transformation in urban India. She has written on divergent aspects of everyday work and livelihood precarity experienced by the rural agrarian peasantry and urban landless labour in India and conceptualized their agency and resilience as a socio-political response to uneven forms of agrarian-urban uncertainty. As one of the qualitative post-doctoral researchers for the project, she will work on divergent qualitative and experience-based measurement aspects of intra-household food insecurity in rural-urban India.

Charumita is a qualitative social science researcher with a background in geography and sociology. Her work is located at the intersections of the sociology of the family, social demography, and gender studies. For her PhD thesis, she explored how socio-cultural contexts and local political economy shape the gender preferences for children. Her previous work has focused on understanding the varying preferences of children's birth sex amongst various communities in the Jammu, Kashmir, and Ladakh regions of highland South Asia. Previously, she worked as a consultant for International Centre for Research on Women. Charu has joined our project as a qualitative research associate and will play a crucial role in the project's qualitative data collection and analysis to study the intra-household dynamics that play a role in determining access to nutrition, health, and well-being.

Swayamshree is a social science researcher from India. Her research interests revolve around gender, caste, and feminist theory. For her PhD thesis, she investigates the current status of traditional menstruation rituals and practices in rural and urban parts of the eastern Indian state of Odisha. She uses ethnographic data on menstruation as an entry point to explore the role of everyday menstrual practices in constructing women's identities who are positioned differently. In addition, she has written about women's anxieties due to menstrual irregularities, late marriage, and reproductive ageing. During this project, she will study the multifaceted consequences of food insecurity in India.

IMPACT OF RISING TEMPERATURES ON FOOD SECURITY

A tremendous amount of research shows that the climate crisis is negatively impacting food systems and threatens to be a growing problem for global food security in the coming years. One important factor is rising temperatures, which previous research has shown can affect agricultural yields and food availability. However, what's less well-researched is how higher temperatures may increase food insecurity in the short term. For one thing, when temperatures are extremely high, people may have to miss work or maybe be less productive, which can have a negative impact on home food production and household income. At the same time, households might have increasing costs, such as electricity, on hotter days, meaning households may be spending more while earning less on extremely hot days. Similarly, extreme heat can cause physiological responses that require potentially expensive medical attention, particularly for people who are already experiencing chronic diseases such as hypertension or diabetes. All of these factors can mean there are fewer resources available to purchase food during extreme heat spells. Together with colleagues Ms Carolin Kroeger and Professor Aaron Reeves at the University of Oxford, Dr Fledderjohann's recent work uses statistical models to look at the associations between exposure to higher temperatures and risks of food insecurity for households in 17 states in India. They find that experiencing at least three hot days in the previous week is indeed associated with an increase in moderate to severe food insecurity. They also find that those households with lower incomes experience greater increases in food insecurity compared to households with higher incomes. A preprint version of the paper is available here wp.lancs.ac.uk/foodequity/research/publications/

FIELDWORK PLANS

Our team is excited to be heading into the field soon! The work we have completed to date has been based on data collected by the brilliant Young Lives team. This has been an important grounding for our project, and we will have further work coming out of the Young Lives data in the months ahead. However, we have now reached a stage where we have identified gaps in our understanding that in-depth interview data would best fill. Therefore, we plan to head to Uttar Pradesh and Goa beginning in late mid-December. We aim to speak with families about their experiences of food insecurity and understand how food is allocated within households. We are immensely grateful to the project stakeholders who provided valuable feedback on our data collection plans, including detailed comments on our interview guides. We plan on speaking with multiple members of the same household and hope to speak to as many as 60 households in total. By speaking with children as young as 7, adolescents, and adults of all ages, we hope to understand food-related inequalities within households better. And, of course, we also plan to focus on how COVID has impacted families over the past several years. We plan to spend approximately two months in the field and hope to have some preliminary findings available to share in our next newsletter. Stay tuned!

PARTICIPATION IN ANH LEARNING LAB SESSION

At this year's Agriculture, Nutrition, and Health (ANH) academy week 2022 learning lab, project post-doctoral research associate Dr. Thomas Argaw attended a learning lab session entitled "Calculating the cost and affordability of healthy diets: Indicators to understand food access". Poverty is frequently measured based on the cost of basic needs approach, which considers whether households can afford the cost of a basket of goods to achieve a minimum welfare level. According to this measure, households are considered poor if they spend less than the cost associated with this basket of goods. However, the cost of basic needs approach may not reflect nutritional needs. A presenter from the learning lab explained, "the cost of basic needs approach estimates food baskets that satisfy a dietary energy standard while reflecting consumption patterns of poor households. However, poor households typically consume monotonous diets characterized by large quantities of calorically cheap staple foods that are poor sources of nutrients". In other words, when using the cost of basic needs approach, the nutrition-related standard is limited to energy requirements only, significantly undermining the cost of acquiring a healthy diet and are severely deficient in multiple micro-nutrients.

The authors argue this is one main drawback. Their alternative, the affordability of the healthy diets approach that calculates food poverty lines, shows how consumption patterns reflect "nutritious food to meet dietary needs". Under this approach, the cost of an affordable healthy diet is calculated using Food-Based Dietary Guidelines (FBDG). The FBDG offers a superior nutritional standard for the construction of food poverty lines based on nutrient-adequate diets, diets that protect against non-communicable diseases, and diets that are dignified and culturally acceptable. Details of the approach can be accessed here: https://cutt.ly/YN3kDTl

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

Peer-Reviewed Articles:

Fledderjohann, J., Channon, M. (2022). Gender, nutritional disparities, and child survival in Nepal. BMC Nutrition, 8 (50), 1-15. DOI: 10.1186/s40795-022-00543-6.

Other Publications:

Fledderjohann, J and Channon, M. (2022). "8 billion people: why trying to control the population is often futile – and harmful". The Conversation

Fledderjohann, J and Patterson, S. (2022). "Why food insecurity matter for reproductive justice". Thrive North Lancashire.

Kroeger, C, Reeves, A and Fledderjohann, J. (2022). "Higher Temperatures are Associated with Short-term Increases in Food Insecurity – A Natural Experiment Across Indian States, 2014-2017". SocArXiv. June 23. doi:10.31235/osf.io/wxt6g.

Fledderjohann, J., Clair, A., & Knowles, B (2022, July 4). Feeding the Future? Evidence on Food Insecurity in the UK. Centre for Child & Family Justice Research Policy Brief Series, Lancaster, UK.

Healy et al. (2022). The NCRM wayfinder guide to equitable research relations in and after Covid-19. Wayfinder Guide for the National Centre for Research Methods.