

### LETTER TO THE EDITOR

## Food insecurity and child undernutrition in rural areas: additional comments

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To the Editor,

We read with much interest the recently published report by Tafese *et al.*<sup>(1)</sup>, which highlighted the present status of food insecurity in households and child undernutrition in rural Ethiopia. Their results<sup>(1)</sup> appear to suggest that food-related conditions around children in such rural areas should not be overlooked. This is an issue for not only children but also mothers. As a rural researcher, I would like to mention two recent viewpoints to be aware of concerning the nutritional interaction between children and mothers in order to further discuss this topic.

The first viewpoint is the negative effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on food-related conditions in mothers as a ‘gender’ problem. While Tafese *et al.*<sup>(1)</sup> also state that the COVID-19 pandemic likely exacerbates food insecurity in rural areas, a recent review paper has noted the possible expansion of gender disparity in food security in Africa<sup>(2)</sup>; namely, women could experience more food insecurity than men, since women might more readily lose employment or have to stop farming while staying at home due to COVID-19<sup>(2)</sup>. This would impair the birth and child care in mothers, thereby promoting the undernutrition of their children.

The second viewpoint is the epigenetic effect of malnutrition in pregnancy and childhood on later life stages<sup>(3)</sup>. The finding of a recent research in a rural cohort population<sup>(3)</sup> indicated that the most strongly affected methylated regions were those significantly related to the pathways involved in reproductive behaviours, neuronal systems, and learning and memory regulation<sup>(3)</sup>. Children with these pathologies may bear some sociomedical burden in the future.

Thus, according to the report of Tafese *et al.*<sup>(1)</sup> and recent studies describing the importance of nutritional interaction between children and mothers<sup>(2,3)</sup>, food insecurity and child undernutrition in rural areas are being increasingly recognised as serious issues. A greater understanding by both the public and governments concerning the present situation is needed in order to address this issue.

Kazuhiko Kotani

Division of Community and Family Medicine, Jichi Medical University, Shimotsuke-City, Tochigi, Japan

**Corresponding author:** Kazuhiko Kotani, fax +81-285-44-0628, email [kazukotani@jichi.ac.jp](mailto:kazukotani@jichi.ac.jp)

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