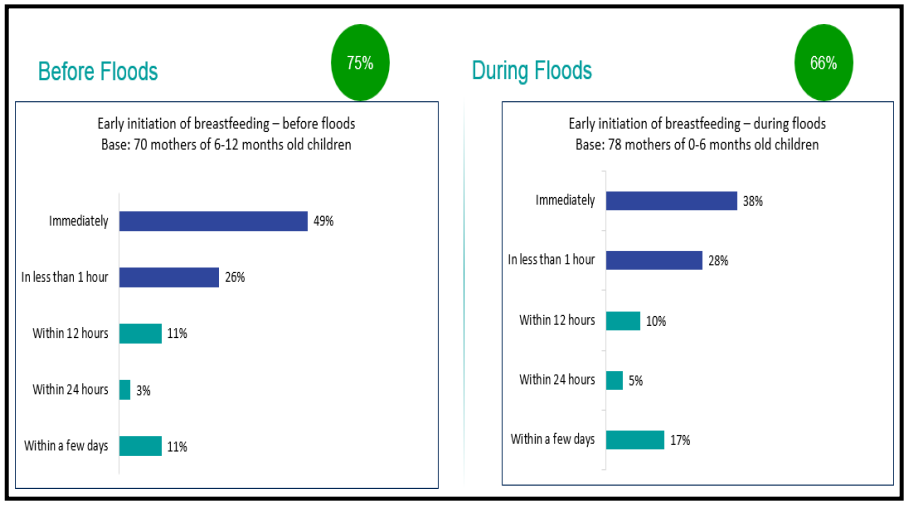
Rapid Care & Feeding Assessment in Flood Affected Areas- Assessing Affected Children Needs in Real-time (February 2023, MoNHSR&C, UNICEF & IPSOS)

Pakistan experienced a century's record-breaking flood disaster in 2022 and is currently undergoing facing a humanitarian emergency, affecting the lives of over 33 million people including 16 million children. IPSOS was commissioned by UNICEF and the MoNHSR&C to conduct a rapid care and feeding assessment in flood affected areas. The objective of the study was to document the impact of the floods on the nutritional practices and needs of infants and young children of 0 to 24 months of age as well as the nutritional needs of pregnant women.

The study was carried out in the 15 most affected districts across four provinces – Balochistan, Punjab, Sindh, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). Using a mixed-methods approach, both qualitative and quantitative data have been analyzed along with the desk review. For quantitative data collection, a computer-assisted telephone interview (CATI) method was implemented. A total of 401 women, comprising 58 pregnant women and 343 mothers of 0–24-month-old children were interviewed as part of the quantitative component. Qualitative data collection was conducted via 12 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and 12 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs). Out of the total of 12 FGDs, six were conducted in Sindh, three in Balochistan, two in Punjab, and one in KP.

Rapid MUAC screening was also part of the study and was conducted in flood-affected Union councils of 15 districts among all four provinces with a sample size of 100 children per each district.

The result indicates that more than half (55%) of the pregnant women were only consuming one food group during the floods. This indicates a vulnerability in terms of access to nutrition and health of pregnant and lactating women during the disaster. Food consumption was lowest amongst pregnant and lactating women in Sindh and Balochistan, especially in Sindh for vitamins and minerals.

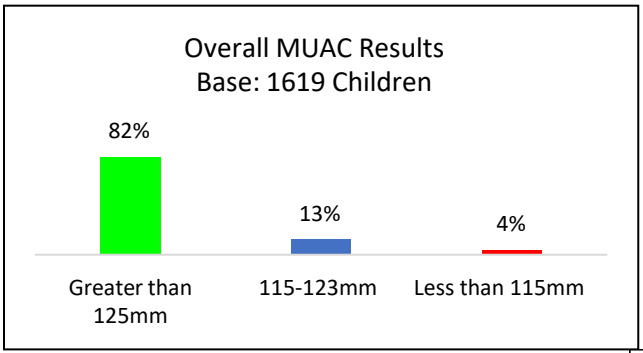


Breastfeeding practices and consequently the nutrition of infants aged 0 to 6 months were also adversely affected by the disaster. The study found that there was a **difference of 9 per cent in early initiation of breastfeeding** during floods. The frequency of breastfeeding also decreased during floods. It was reported that the infants 0 to 6 months old- were being breastfed on average 9 times a day before the flooding, which **fell to 7 times a day** during the disaster. Further inquiry into this revealed that this decrease was due to privacy issues that the lactating mothers faced caused by displacement and loss of shelter.

The difference **in exclusive breastfeeding practice** before and after floods shows an **8% decrease in infants** getting only breast milk. There was also a **3% increase in infants getting infant formula** after the floods; 67% indicated it was because they felt they could not produce enough milk, 33% had unsuccessful breastfeeding experiences before, and 17% animal milk was readily available. The report also indicated that, there was an **increase in the availability of infant formula during the flood**, received either through a prescription from medical staff or bought from shops or medical stores.

Dietary diversity for young children, aged 6 to 23 months, was also adversely affected due to this disaster. **About 7 in 10 such children reportedly had to sustain on just one food group (mainly carbohydrates) during the floods**, indicating the severe lack of an adequate diverse diet. The study finds that mothers were aware and worried about the nutritional needs of their children not being met. They expressed dissatisfaction with the food they were giving their children. Some even reported feeding only biscuits and rice to their children during floods, while some reported only being able to feed boiled potatoes to their children.

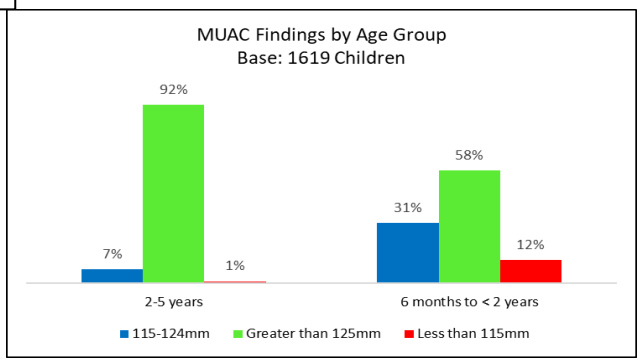
Analysis of Mid-Upper Arm Circumference (MUAC) Measurement Data



Rapid MUAC screening of 1,619 children was conducted and out of those, 72 children (4.4%) were diagnosed as Severe Acute Malnourished, while 213 children (13%) were identified as Moderately Acute Malnourished with MUAC **resulting in wasting rate of around 17.4% among children 6 to 59 months.**

However, the prevalence of wasting under 2 years of age was more pronounced; **SAM 12.1%, MAM 30.5%. SAM girls (5.7%) were more affected than boys (3.1%).**

Sindh province was the worst affected with wasting rate at 22%, followed by Balochistan (GAM at 15%), KP (13%), and Punjab (12%).



Recommendations

1) Capacity building of medical staff at the tehsil and district level, building knowledge and awareness on the food and nutritional requirements of pregnant and lactating mothers, and children
2) Proper isolated and designated breastfeeding areas for lactating mothers in public and temporary spaces should be provided to ensure their privacy and comfort. A trained counselor at the breastfeeding corner is essential, as they could provide assistance and guidance as needed.
3) Counselling for mothers should be arranged to eradicate the innate myths regarding breastfeeding.
4) More community-based nutrition services in the early tracing and timely management of wasted children.
5) Targeted awareness campaign and capacity development of rescue and relief workers to ensure that relief, particularly in the form of food packages, ensures dietary diversity. Medium to long term interventions should also consider addressing the food insecurity issues that perpetuate malnutrition.
6) To address nutrition deficiencies in pregnant and lactating mothers, tehsil and district-level hospitals, clinics, and dispensaries must be stocked with essential nutrition supplies.
7) Functional coordination between the nutrition sector working group and the food security working group is mandatory for a coordinated nutrition services and food provision response
8) The study must pave way for an in-depth evidence-based study on the nutritional status and food insecurity faced by pregnant and lactating women and children from the ages 0 to 24 months during the flood crisis.