

SERVING EQUALITY:

THE GENDERED PLIGHT OF FOOD INSECURITY IN INDIA

BY EMILY SIMPSON

INTRODUCTION

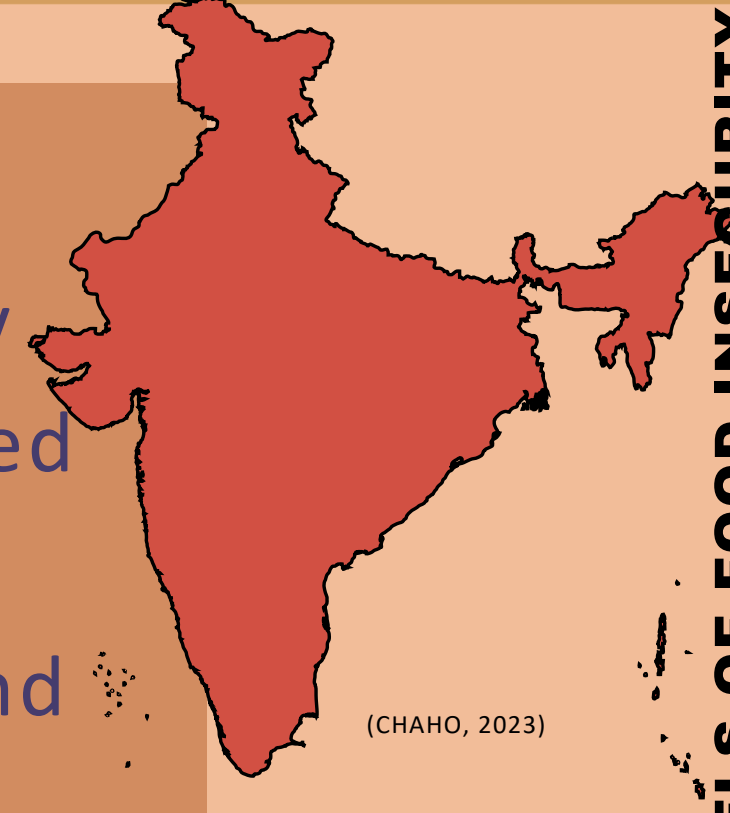
In 2020 India had the highest number of people experiencing food insecurity globally, 10% of the population, leading to 200 million people undernourished (Ganpule et al., 2023)(McKay. et al, 2020). The WHO (World Health Organisation) reported alarmingly high rates in adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women (Narayan et al., 2018).

Why are women in India disproportionately impacted?

This poster AIMS to examine:

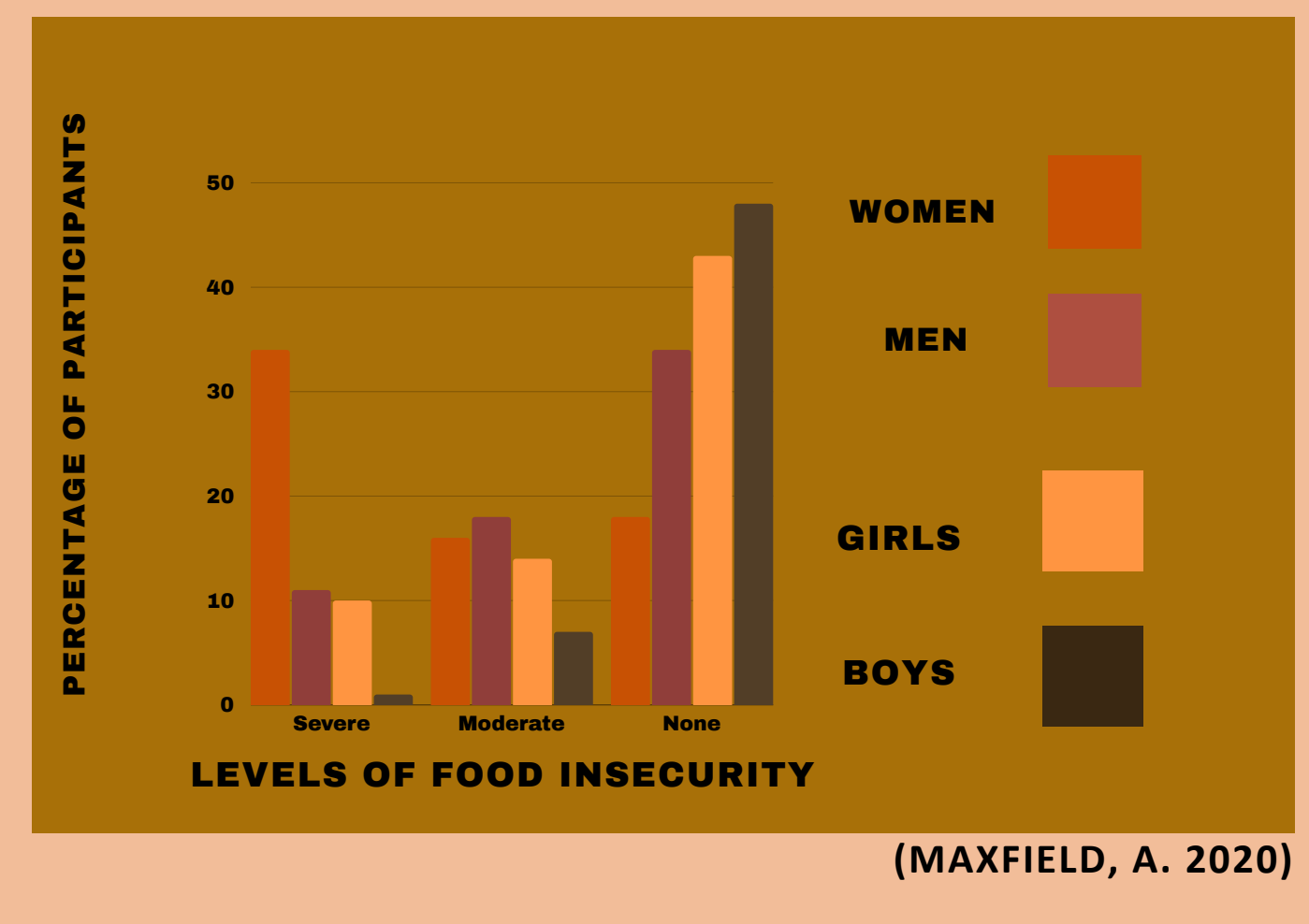
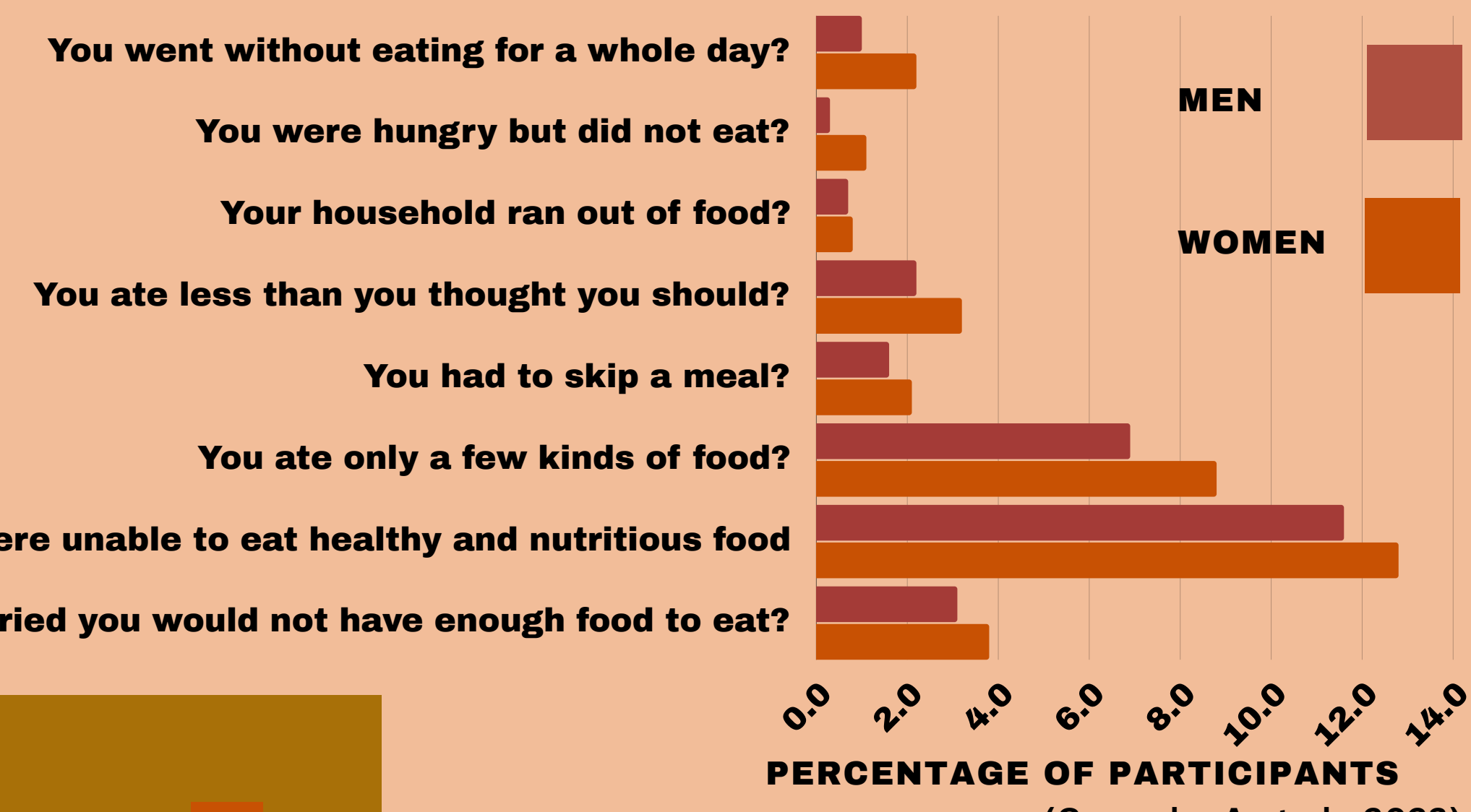
- Physical, social, cultural, and the community barriers contributing to these inequalities.
- Impact of malnutrition on physical and mental well-being.

Food insecurity in India is complex and multifactorial; the causes of this are not explored (Ganpule et al., 2023).



LEVELS OF FOOD INSECURITY

FOOD SECURITY IN VIZAG, INDIA



The above cross-sectional study of 9,005 adults across the North and South of India show women reporting more food insecurity than men in all FIES questions (Ganpule, A et al, 2023). To the left shows girls in Jaipur were found to experience more food insecurity than boys, even within the same household (Maxfield, A, 2020).

Method

Using "Web of Science", "Pub Med" and "Google Scholar" articles were found with the key words "India", "food security", "gender", "inequality", "malnutrition", "undernutrition", "health" and "well-being". Several sites were used to access a range of literature. The abstracts were assessed to determine their relevancy to gender inequalities in food distribution in India. Articles suggesting the highest relevance were then read fully. All the selected papers had research carried out in India, and were written or translated into English.

IMPACT OF FOOD INSECURITY

MALNUTRITION CAUSES:

- MUSCLE WASTING
- INCREASED WOUND HEALING TIME
- HIGHER RISK OF INFECTION
- DIZZINESS
- LACK OF CONCENTRATION
- PSYCHOSOCIAL IMPACTS
- DEPRESSION, ANXIETY AND SELF NEGLECT
- FETAL COMPLICATIONS

(SAUNDERS J AND SMITH T. 2010).

NOT ENOUGH FOOD

- 60% of mothers in West Singhbhu, India, experienced muscle wasting (Sinha et al., 2020).
- 45% of mothers in Bihar, Chhattisgarh and Odisha, India, were undernourished (Reshmi S R. et al., 2019).
- 18.7% of women have a BMI of less than 18, classified as thin compared to only 15.8% of men in India (USAID, 2023).

FOOD INSECURITY

INADEQUATE NUTRITION

- Over half of mothers of reproductive age in Vizag, rural India, suffer from anaemia (Gupta et al., 2019b). In 2019, USAID found 25% of Men across India had anaemia compared to 57% of women (USAID, 2023).
- Women across rural India eat considerably less nutrient-rich food such as, dairy, fruit, vegetables and meat than men (Ganpule et al., 2023).



NO CHOICE IN FOOD

- In Maharashtra, India, only 39.5% of mothers with children under 5 are nutritionally empowered, compared to their spouses' rate of 77.2% (Saha, S and Narayanan, S, 2022).
- Female non-agricultural workers earn only 65% of male wages, and female manufacturing workers earn a mere 59% of male wages. Only 25% of women in India are formally employed, compared to 76% of men (Srivastava, N and Srivastava, R. 2010).
- Only 18% of employed women in India have full control over how their own money is spent (USAID, 2023).

DEFINITIONS:

NUTRITIONAL EMPOWERMENT: ABILITY TO ACHIEVE GOOD NUTRITION AND HEALTH. MEASURED BY WOMENS EMPOWERMENT NUTRITIONAL INDEX (WENI)(NARAYANAN ET AL., 2019).

FOOD INSECURITY: LACK OF ACCESS TO A VARIETY OF HEALTHY, DESIRED FOODS WHICH MEET BASIC NEEDS. CAN VARY BY SEASON AND WITHIN HOUSEHOLDS. MEASURED USING FIES AN 8 QUESTION SELF REPORT TOOL (FAO, 2023).



PORTION SIZES

Social norms, still encourage woman to be submissive, docile and connected to the home. They become responsible for household chores, including cooking and food preparation and ensuring the available food is able to stretch (Chorghade, G. et al. 2006). Additionally, social convention, particularly in rural India, leads to women serving themselves last and often boys before girls. These reasons both simultaneously lead to women receiving in smaller portion sizes.

NEED FOR MORE

A focus group study in rural Maharashtra, India found men and women agreed women had the most work in the house and on the farm. This resulted in women having less time to eat and were sometimes too tired to eat. With this increased workload, the quantity of food should reflect this (Chorghade, G. et al. 2006). There is no evidence woman in Maharashtra reduced their workload or increased their diet during pregnancy, severely affecting their level of nutrition (Chorghade, G. et al. 2006).

WHAT HAS ALREADY BEEN DONE:

- India launched the EAT Right campaign in 2021 to promote sustainability in the nutrition agenda.
- The Indian government has begun educating on the importance of a varied diet (Narayan et al., 2018).

LIMITATIONS OF THE DATA:

- This data is from various locations in India, yet national disparities have not been accounted for. However, the range of data does highlight the clear gender inequity.
- Multiple data sets have been used without highlighting the limitations of individual collection methods, or specific research challenges.
- No exploration into causes of Indian food insecurity.

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