Food Intake in Pregnancy During Indonesian Crisis

Summary of published paper

Beginning in August 1997, Indonesia experienced a rapid deterioration in its economic situation. Prices of food and other basic necessities rose sharply amidst a rapid increase in unemployment, seriously eroding the purchasing power of large segments of the population. Between 1997 and 1998, the Indonesian per capita Gross National Product (GNP) declined by 41%, from US$1,089 to US$640. The value of the Rupiah in June 1998 was a mere one-sixth of its pre-crisis value (July 1997) and by July 1998, it was estimated that the number of Indonesians living beneath the poverty line had soared to about 40%. In order to examine the impact of this crisis on food patterns, a cross-sectional study on pregnant women was conducted between 1996-8. The study involved six 24 hour recalls of food intake during the second trimester of pregnancy among 450 women in Purworejo district, Central Java, Indonesia.

The study showed that rice was a strongly inferior good - meaning that when the price of rice increased, the consumption of rice increased and the consumption of animal food decreased. In other words, when the price of rice went up, people cut down on animal food intake and used that money to buy rice at a higher price. The intake of nuts and pulses increased during the crisis and this food group, particularly fermented soybeans or tempe, became the predominant source of calcium and iron. The intake of vegetables increased during the crisis and were the most important source of vitamin A, especially spinach and cassava leaves. Intake of fruit decreased, as it was more expensive.

Food patterns differed among the various subgroups of women. Rich women had a better food intake pattern than the other groups and were able to maintain a good diet during the crisis. Rural poor women with access to rice fields increased their intake of rice during the crisis, while reducing their intake of other staple foods. Rural poor, landless women increased their intake of nuts and pulses during the crisis. Urban poor women decreased their intakes of most food groups during the crisis. Overall during the crisis, the food patterns of women appeared to become less varied, due to reduced intakes of non-rice staples foods, animal food and fruits.
