



## Exploring food insecurity in Nakuru Town West Sub County: Vulnerabilities, perceptions and behavioral responses

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### Abstract

Food insecurity disproportionately impacts the lives of families in vulnerable households, which struggle with financial instability, low-income and unemployment. This paper investigated the food insecurity status of vulnerable households within the Nakuru Town West Sub County using the Household Food Insecurity Access Scale (HFIAS) model developed by Coates, Swindale, and Bilinsky (2007) [2]. Additionally, the paper explored respondents' perceptions and behavioral responses regarding household food insecurity.

**Keywords:** Food insecurity, vulnerable households, household food insecurity access scale (HFIAS), perceptions and behavioral responses

### Introduction

Food insecurity is a dire issue that goes beyond mere hunger. According to the WHO, (2018) [14], it is a complex challenge with far-reaching implications for nutrition, health, and overall human development. According to Daszkiewicz, (2022) [3], food is an indispensable necessity for human survival, constituting one of the most fundamental needs of mankind. Despite the world's current capacity to produce enough food to sustain its entire population, the unfortunate reality persists that nearly one billion people suffer from hunger. This persistent hunger stems not from a global scarcity of food, but rather from systemic issues surrounding its distribution and accessibility. The scourge of food insecurity and hunger not only represents a deprivation of the most basic human need but also serves as an enabler to other socio-economic challenges. Insufficient access to food can act as a catalyst for malnutrition, compromised health, and hindered developmental progress, thereby perpetuating a cycle of poverty and deprivation, (Frona, Szenderak and Harangi-Rakos, 2019).

Bahiru, Senapathy and Bojago, (2022) [1] in their study Status of household food security, its determinants, and coping strategies in the Humbo district, Southern Ethiopia argued that in order to achieve genuine food security, it necessitates not only the consistent availability of adequate food supplies but also ensuring that individuals possess the means, whether through income or other resources, to procure or exchange for food. The spectrum of food security has widened to encompass aspects beyond mere access including proper food preparation, storage practices, as well as fostering nutritional literacy and childcare knowledge within communities as well as the provision of adequate health and sanitation services. Therefore, these services are indispensable in safeguarding the nutritional well-being of individuals and communities, thereby bolstering their resilience against the pervasive threats posed by hunger and malnutrition.

Vulnerability can take various forms, from economic instability to social marginalization, and these factors often

intertwine, exacerbating the difficulties faced by households. According to Leroy *et al*, (2015) [7], the inadequate distribution of food resources plays a pivotal role in perpetuating food insecurity, as it prevents the efficient flow of food from surplus regions to those in need. This results in pockets of hunger persisting even in the midst of plenty, highlighting the urgency of addressing distribution-related issues on a global scale. On the other hand, income inequality is another critical dimension of vulnerability contributing to food insecurity. Even when food is available, households with limited financial resources find themselves unable to access an adequate supply. Vulnerable households, often residing in marginalized areas, face challenges in accessing healthcare facilities and sanitation infrastructure. Poor health and sanitation exacerbate the impact of food insecurity, creating a vicious cycle that hampers overall development, WFP and WHO (2018) [14].

According to Sidh and Basu (2011), the uncertainty of employment such as seasonal jobs assure no financial security, especially amongst the youth. These groups possess scarce skills which cannot assure them permanent employment, and this result in food shortages due to inadequate spending capacity and women and children are more prone to food insecurities because of gender and age differences. Female headed households are much more prone to food insecurity since they are more likely to have unreliable employment which means they cannot be able to provide nutritious food for their families (Sonnino *et al*, 2014) [13].

According to USAID, (2013) Kenya is urbanizing at a rate faster than its population growth rate. Today, 30% of the country's population lives in urban areas, and by 2033, half of the population will reside in urban areas in what has been described as a spatial tipping point with regards to population growth. 40% of those residing in urban areas in Kenya, live in slums or slums like areas characterized by low or no income and unplanned living spaces. Population increase in such areas results in an increase in population of those without access to food hence increasing further increasing poverty levels.

Kimani-Murage *et al* (2014) <sup>[6]</sup> further observe that urban centers are characterized by cash-based economies, with even the extremely vulnerable accessing most of their basic needs through the market. Access to income is therefore essential for household food security of the urban vulnerable. Most of the urban vulnerable rely on wage labor. In Kenya for instance, men are mostly employed in low-wage casual or temporary jobs in industries or construction sites while women are usually employed as domestic workers. They rely on extremely low levels of income, yet they sometimes pay more for goods and services compared to their non-slum counterparts, leading to elevated level of vulnerability to food insecurity within their households (Cohen and Garret, 2010). As a result, low incomes can result to food insecurity and when experiencing food insecurity parents are compelled to engage in food-related parenting practices because of scarcity of food (Wolfson and Bleich, 2015).

According to Shisanya *et al.* (2011) <sup>[12]</sup>, as food prices escalate, the ability of these vulnerable households to afford an adequate amount of food diminishes, ultimately leading to reduced food consumption. Even households engaged in agricultural activities may find themselves unable to cope with the increased costs, as they allocate a substantial portion of their income to staple foods. Drawing upon the UNICEF conceptual framework on the causes of malnutrition, Ruel *et al.* (2010) <sup>[11]</sup> stress on the critical challenges surrounding food and nutrition security in urban settings. They contend that urban food markets often exhibit inefficiencies, stemming from their inadequate infrastructure and suboptimal locations in handling the substantial volumes of food passing through them. Consequently, urban poor consumers frequently face constraints in purchasing food in bulk, leading them to procure food items on a daily basis and eventually pay higher prices per unit. This purchasing pattern exacerbates their reliance on street foods, driven by income constraints and time limitations that hinder home cooking for many urban poor households

Mitlin and Satterthwaite (2012) <sup>[18]</sup> in their study urban poverty in the global south; scale and nature further highlight how urban environments compel poor households to balance various competing demands, often at the expense of consistent access to basic necessities like food. They emphasize that low-income households are often confronted with numerous competing demands. In order to navigate these demands, where the cost of living is high and resources are limited, poor households must make difficult decisions about how to allocate their scarce resources. As a result, they may prioritize certain expenses, such as rent or utilities, over others, like food.

The above literature portrays food insecurity status in the context of vulnerability across the world, however the researcher aimed to establish the status of food insecurity in the study area of Nakuru Town West Sub County and how they impacted on the performance of parenting roles among the respondents in the study area.

## Materials and Methods

The study was conducted in Nakuru Town West Sub County located in Nakuru County Kenya between May and December 2023. The rationale for selecting the study area is that Nakuru is among the most densely populated counties, with Nakuru Town West Sub County having a population

density of about 798 persons per square kilometre, among the highest in Nakuru County (Nakuru County Integrated Development Plan, 2018). Furthermore, Nakuru Town has experienced an increase in population because of urbanization and rural to urban migration. According to the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS), Nakuru town's urban population has been growing steadily from 152,000 people in 1991 to more than 470000 in 2021 (KNBS, 2021). Urban population dynamics have social, economic, and environmental effects, food insecurity being among the major concerns of increased population (Dzator *et al.*, 2022). Urban centres often rely on external food supply chains, and the strain on these systems can lead to shortages or price increases, exacerbating food insecurity.

This study employed a descriptive survey research design. This design was particularly suitable for capturing the prevailing conditions and understanding the ways in which food insecurity impacted the performance of parental roles within the study area. Given the expansive nature of the study area, the design's capacity to cover a wide geographic spread became particularly advantageous. The descriptive survey approach allowed for the collection of detailed and varied data, providing a holistic view of the relationship between food insecurity, coping mechanisms, and parental responsibilities. The target population of the study comprised of all households in Nakuru Town West Sub County. From households, household heads were invited to provide information about the influence of food insecurity on parenthood in the Sub County. The list of households in the sub county was obtained from Nakuru Town West Sub County Social Development Office.

The study utilized a sample of 381. The sample size selection was determined by Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample determination table which recommends a sample of 381 for a study target population of 40000. After sample determination, the researcher divided the sub county into clusters. The researcher then used proportionate sampling technique to determine the number of respondents. The justification for proportionate sampling is to ensure that each of the five wards is represented in the sample according to population size.

This study investigated the status of food insecurity among vulnerable households within the Nakuru Town West Sub County using the Household Food Insecurity Access Scale (HFIAS) model developed by Coates, Swindale, and Bilinsky (2007) <sup>[2]</sup>. The data collected was analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. For quantitative analysis, descriptive statistics were used to summarize and interpret the data, and the results were presented through frequency tables and cross tabulation. The researcher organized 6 Focus Groups Discussions (FGDs), one for each of the 6 wards in the study. Participants for FGDs were purposively selected considering sex. Each FGD was comprised of six to ten participants. The researcher who also acted as a moderator utilized the FGDs guide to ensure orderly discussions. Efforts were made to ensure that each participant contributed something to each discussion topic. In addition, equal time (three minutes) was given to each participant per discussion topic to avoid domination in the discussions.

Key informant interviews were conducted, drawing on the expertise of individuals possessing valuable insights. This strategic approach aimed to enrich the study with expert

perspectives, providing a deeper understanding of the issues under investigation. The key informants, comprising officers from the department of social protection, local administration, community leaders, local groups and representatives from non-governmental organizations, were selected based on their specialized knowledge and relevance to the research focus. The interviews, conducted over a two-week period, employed an interview guide crafted by the researcher himself. This guide served as a structured framework for posing questions pertinent to each informant's area of expertise and professional responsibilities.

**Results and Discussion**

**Insufficiency of food in the Household**

The study put forward the following question to respondents to address the issue of food insufficiency in the household; In the past four weeks, did you worry that your household would not have enough food? According to the findings from this study, responses were noted by the respondents with regards to their worry or not about their household's food insecurity. Therefore, to determine if and how often this occurred, a follow up frequency of occurrence question was asked to the respondents and their responses are detailed in table 1 below.

**Table 1:** Insufficiency of food in the Household

| How often did you worry that your household would not have enough food | Frequency | Percentage |
|--|-----------|------------|
| No   | 35        | 9          |
| Sometimes  | 163       | 43         |
| Often  | 45        | 12         |
| Rarely   | 138       | 36         |
| Total  | 381       | 100        |

Field Data, 2023

As shown on table 1 above, majority of the respondents in the study, 43% (163) Were sometimes worried about their household not having enough food, representing more than ten times in the past four weeks, 36% (138) were rarely worried about their household not having enough food, indicating between three to ten times in the past four weeks, while only 12% (45) often worried about their households not having enough food, representing once or twice in the last four months. 9% (35) of the respondents claimed that they were not worried about their household not having enough food. These findings clearly show that households in the study area were generally worried that their households would not have sufficient food. The study attributed this to two causes; First their low incomes which meant that whatever little was earned had to be distributed to cover other expenses apart from buying food such as rent and school fees. Secondly the study also attributed this to seasonal employment since most of the respondents were casual labourers and had no permanent employment and hence, they had to constantly look for work to supplement their daily needs for food.

Kimani-Murage (2014) <sup>[6]</sup> identifies that low-income areas in Kenya operate within a cash-based system where food is purchased daily. This daily purchasing cycle exposes households to greater risk of food insecurity, as food spending can easily be overshadowed by other pressing expenses such as rent and school fees. In the study area, similar patterns are observed. Households face food insecurity primarily due to low incomes that are spread thin across various essential expenses. This financial strain means that, like in Kimani-Murage's study, food often becomes a lower priority in household budgeting. However, the study area also reveals an additional layer of complexity: the reliance on seasonal employment. Casual laborers, who lack stable and predictable incomes, frequently encounter difficulties in ensuring consistent food security. This aligns with Kimani-Murage's assertion that irregular income exacerbates food insecurity, but it also introduces a specific challenge. Seasonal work introduces variability in income, which can lead to periods of acute food insecurity,

especially when earnings are insufficient to cover both immediate and ongoing needs.

In the focus group discussions, the fact that households rely on market purchases for their food further illustrates the financial strain. When income is unpredictable, purchasing food daily becomes a challenge. Households in the study area must navigate this instability, making it difficult to maintain a consistent and adequate food supply. Thus, while Kimani-Murage's findings provide a framework for understanding food insecurity in low-income areas, the study area's context adds depth to this analysis. The relationship between low, irregular incomes and the daily cash-based food purchasing system creates a particularly challenging environment for maintaining food security.

"Without a steady job, the pressure to put food on the table for your family is huge. You're always worried about whether you'll find work the next day, and it's stressful. So, every meal and necessities I manage to provide for my family is important. You can see the stress on people's faces, friends and neighbors as they try fulfilling their duties. But even with all this, people somehow always find a strength to persevere. The daily struggle to feed your family becomes a way of showing you can get through tough times." Male 30 years.

During a key informant interview, a community leader noted that low incomes have exacerbated the food insecurity in the area, holding that targeted interventions were key to addressing this issue.

"In this community, job uncertainty impacts more than just getting food on the table. For many, securing stable employment is crucial for supporting their entire family and affects their emotional well-being. This stress influences daily life, relationships, and mental health. To address this, we need to foster a supportive environment that recognizes our shared challenges and promotes job security for instance strengthening local initiatives, support networks, and policy changes to help build a resilient and sustainable community".

Table 2 below shows the cross tabulation of household reliance on food sources and how often this occurred.

**Table 1.1:** Cross tabulation for reliance on food source

| Did you rely on any of the following sources of food in the past four weeks? If yes, how often did this happen? |                 |   |  |  |       |
|---|-----------------|---|--|--|-------|
|   |                 | Yes. How often did this happen?                       |  |  | Total |
|   |                 | Yes, often more than ten times in the past four weeks | Yes, but rarely once or twice in the past four weeks | Yes, sometimes three to ten times in the past four weeks |       |
| Did you rely on any of the following sources of food in the past four weeks?                                    | Purchasing food | 163   | 0  | 138  | 301   |
|   | Borrowing       | 0   | 45   | 0  | 45    |
|   | Food Assistance | 0   | 0  | 35   | 35    |
| Total   |                 |   |  |  | 381   |

In the dataset displayed in table 1.1 above, the frequency of reliance on various food sources over the past four weeks reveals distinct patterns. Purchasing food was the most prevalent method, with 163 respondents relying on it more than ten times and 138 using it between three to ten times, indicating it as the primary food source for the majority. Borrowing food was reported by only 45 respondents. Food assistance, including support from programs or charities, was utilized by 35 respondents, this distribution highlights that while purchasing food is a common and frequent practice, borrowing and food assistance are used less often by those who experienced food insecurity. This indicates that while food assistance programs are important, vulnerable households still rely heavily on purchasing food despite their financial constraints.

**Table 1.1:** Chi-Square Test results for insufficiency of food in the Household

| Chi-Square Tests   |                      |    |                                   |
|--------------------|----------------------|----|-----------------------------------|
|                    | Value                | df | Asymptotic Significance (2-sided) |
| Pearson Chi-Square | 381.000 <sup>a</sup> | 3  | .000                              |
| Likelihood Ratio   | 229.002              | 3  | .000                              |
| N of Valid Cases   | 381                  |    |                                   |

To assess the strength of the association between reliance on various food sources and their frequencies, a chi-square test was conducted. The results suggest that the frequency of reliance on various food sources is not randomly distributed but rather varies systematically among those who express concern. Therefore, the chi-square analysis confirms a strong relationship between the reliance on various food sources and their frequencies. Purchasing food is the most used source of food by the respondents indicating that it yields the highest results for ensuring household food security in the study area. This source is however strenuous to the households owing to their low incomes. Other sources such as food assistance and borrowing are not reliable in addressing food insecurity owing to their seasonality. This study therefore established that the constant worry of households not having enough food in the households is brought about by the fact that they have low incomes which cannot guarantee them food availability in the house. Having to worry about where to find work the next day to get income and purchase food for the household further creates distress about food availability in the house.

**Inability to eat preferred food due to lack of resources**

To address this issue the study asked the following question: In the past four weeks, were you or any household member not able to eat the kinds of foods you preferred because of a lack of resources? and a follow-up question was put forward

to inquire how often this happened in the past four weeks. The results are shown in table 2 below.

**Table 2:** Inability to eat preferred food due to lack of resources

| How often did you fail to eat your preferred food | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|-----------|------------|
| None  | 107       | 28         |
| Sometimes   | 138       | 36         |
| Often   | 100       | 26         |
| Rarely  | 36        | 10         |
| Total   | 381       | 100        |

Field data, 2023

From the findings in table 2 above 28% (107) of the respondents held that they did not fail to eat their preferred food due to lack of money, another 36% (138) of the respondents said that they sometimes (once or twice in the last for weeks) not able to eat their preferred food due to lack of money to buy them, 26% (100) said that they were often (more than ten times in the past four weeks) forced to eat food which they did not prefer due to lack of resources, 10% (36) said that they rarely (three to ten times in the past four weeks) were unable to eat their preferred food due to lack of resources. In this case therefore, the study established that a majority of the respondents in the study were generally unable to access their preferred meals because of not having enough financial resources to purchase them.

During a focus group discussion, respondents also held that eating preferred foods was not an easy feat since it required to be bought and the limited financial resources had to be spent wisely to cater for other needs.

“Money affects what we eat in a big way. Because we do not have much, we usually have to pick food based on what we can afford, not what we really want. We end up eating a lot of "ugali" and "Sukuma wiki" (kales) and usually stick to "githeri" (maize and beans) the rest of the time. It is not that these foods are bad, but it is not exactly what we dream of having every day. We would love to have more variety, like meat, eggs, or fish, but they are just too expensive for us. So, we make do with what fits our budget. Not being able to afford what we would really like to eat especially for our children is very disheartening” Female 52 years.

The above narration clearly shows that because of lack of financial resources, the respondents were unable to purchase the food that they would prefer to eat and were hence forced to adjust to foods within their low budgets. This further proves that income is a major determinant of household food insecurity. The findings are supported by Gupta *et al*, (2015) [5] who affirmed that decreased incomes could lead to adaptations such as diet change and eating cheap food. It also concurred with Norhasmah *et al* (2010) [10] who held

that poor households rely on less preferred and less expensive foods to ensure the household has food to eat. The study further revealed that household food insecurity resulted in straining of the family’s limited financial resources and hence the household could not afford to eat their preferred food daily. This financial strain further left fewer resources available for other essential needs such as education, healthcare, and childcare. In the focus group discussions, this was further elaborated by the members, “The first thing on my mind, quite literally, is making sure my children and I have enough to eat, depending on what I can afford to buy. Before I even think about getting school uniforms, shoes, or clothes for them, the top priority is filling our stomachs. It might mean putting aside other responsibilities for a bit, but it is necessary to take care of the most important one first feeding the family. At the moment, the focus is on ensuring there is food on the table.”. Female 29 years.

The study findings along with Norhamsah *et al* (2010) and Gupta *et al.* (2015) <sup>[5]</sup> share the common understanding that decreased income leads to changes in dietary habits, with both highlighting the shift to less expensive food options due to financial constraints. However, Gupta *et al* and Norhamsah *et al* (2010) provide a broader perspective on various adaptation strategies families employ in response to reduced income, without delving deeply into the emotional or qualitative aspects. In contrast, this study’s findings emphasize the specific foods the respondent’s family can afford and the emotional impact of not being able to access preferred foods. Additionally, while the authors primarily focus on dietary changes, the study findings extend the discussion by connecting food insecurity to broader financial strains affecting other critical areas such as education, healthcare, and childcare, thereby illustrating the wider implications of financial constraints on overall household well-being.

This clearly indicates that household food insecurity in the study area forces parents to occasionally forego other responsibilities such as their children’s educational needs, healthcare, to cater for the most important one which is feeding them. The study attributed this to their low incomes, which cannot be stretched to cover all their expenditures and hence they chose the most important role which is to provide food for their children. The findings agree with Masarik and Conger, (2017) <sup>[9]</sup> and Gershoff (2007) <sup>[4]</sup> who argued that hardships in lower income households influence parental stress, which in turn affects parents’ roles in raising their children, such as their time and energy as well as responsiveness towards their children.

**Eating fewer meals due to lack of food**

The study put forward the following question: in the past four weeks, did you or any household member have to eat fewer meals in a day because there was not enough food? A significant number of the respondents replied that they had indeed been forced to eat fewer meals, while a comparatively smaller number held that they had not been forced to eat fewer meals. Therefore, a follow-up question to determine the frequency of eating fewer meals was asked and the results recorded in table 3 below.

**Table 3:** Eating fewer meals due to lack of food

| How often did you eat fewer meals due to lack of food. | Frequency | Percentage |
|--|-----------|------------|
| None   | 89        | 23         |
| Sometimes  | 103       | 27         |
| Often  | 83        | 21         |
| Rarely   | 106       | 29         |
| Total  | 381       | 100        |

Field data, 2023

According to the findings from this study, 23% (89) of the respondents did not eat fewer meals due to lack of food, 27% (103) of the respondents claimed that they sometimes (three to ten times) ate fewer meals due to lack of food in the past four weeks, 21% (83) held that they often (more than ten times) ate fewer meals due to lack of food in the past four weeks, 29% (106) said that rarely (maybe once or twice) ate fewer meals due to lack of food for the past four weeks. This indicates that the respondents were forced to eat fewer meals due to lack of food in the household.

The study established that majority of the respondents ate fewer meals to save for a later day and to ensure everyone in the household had food. Further, adults during dire circumstances ate one meal a day to ensure that the children had at least two or three meals for the day. This was reiterated during a focused group discussion where members had the following to say:

“When money is tight, my routine changes. I often end up eating only one meal a day, small snacks or sometimes just having water before bed, to make sure my children have enough to eat. I skip meals not by choice, but to stretch the little food we have. While it is a difficult sacrifice, it brings me some peace knowing my kids are fed. Seeing them go to bed hungry is tough, so I make do with less to ensure they are full. This situation takes a mental and emotional toll, but as a parent, you do what you can for your family. I hope for better days when providing enough food won't be such a constant worry.”. Male 41 years.

“Skipping meals has become a common thing for many of us. When there is not enough to go around, we often find ourselves sacrificing our own meals to make sure our children do not go hungry. It is not an easy choice, but it is necessary to ensure the little ones have something to eat. The priority becomes their well-being, even if it means we have to go without. It is a tough situation, but the love for our children drives us to make these sacrifices in the hope that things will get better”. Female 58” years.

These findings are concurrent with Norhamsah *et al* (2010) <sup>[10]</sup> who reported that low-income households relied on restricting consumption of adults to make children eat as well as eating fewer meals in a day.

**Going the entire day and night without food**

To assess the levels of food insecurity in the households, the study also put forward the following questions to the respondents, in the past four weeks, did you or any household member go an entire day and night without eating anything because there was not enough food? In response to this question, the respondents affirmed that there had been some instances in which they have slept or gone the entire day without eating. The follow up question on the frequency of occurrence of this issue was recorded in table 4 below.

**Table 4:** Going the entire day and night without food

| How often did you go the entire day/night without food | Frequency | Percentage |
|--|-----------|------------|
| None   | 42        | 11         |
| Rarely   | 135       | 35         |
| Sometimes  | 109       | 29         |
| Often  | 95        | 25         |
| Total  | 381       | 100        |

Field data, 2023

Results from the study as shown in table 4.9 above indicate that 11% (42) of the respondents had not gone the entire day or night without a meal. Most of the respondents 35 % (135) rarely (once or twice) went the entire day and night without having a meal in the past four weeks. 29% (109) said that they sometimes (three to ten times) went the entire day and night without a meal in the past four weeks, and 25% (95) mentioned that they had often (more than ten times in the past month) went the entire day and night without food. These results show that households in the study area occasionally go the entire day or night without having something to eat. It also indicates that households had at least one meal a day or night.

This study therefore concluded that despite the dire food situation of households, they always managed to have at least one meal a day. During a focused group discussion, one respondent had the following to say about this situation. “Here in Kaptwembwa, many households struggle to put three meals on the table each day. It’s tough, but we work together to make sure the kids get at least one good meal. During hard times it is not uncommon to borrow essentials from our neighbours and make simple meals like “Matharu” (Sukuma wiki/kales) with “unga” (maize flour). It’s a filling, budget-friendly option for feeding everyone. When resources are tight, we turn to porridge, which is cheap and gives the kids something to fill their stomachs with. The support we get from each other is crucial, reminding us that our community’s strength helps us through tough times”, Female 26 years.

This section was focused on assessing the status of food insecurity of households in the study area. According to this study’s findings, households in the study area were worried about the insufficiency of food in their household, and this indicated that they did not have enough food to feed their families. The study revealed that low incomes occasioned by seasonal employment were the major reasons for households not having enough food and hence this caused them to worry about ensuring availability of food for the household. The study also found that households in the study area were largely unable to eat their preferred foods due to lack of financial resources. Moreover, the households also had access to a limited variety of food because of lacking the financial capabilities to purchase various foods. This therefore forced them to rely on cheap varieties which their low incomes could manage. Furthermore, this study revealed that households in the study area resorted to eating fewer meals to either save food for later days or allow the most vulnerable in the household, the children, to have enough food to eat. This shows the households lacked sufficient food since they could not guarantee a meal for all the members. In addition, the households occasionally went an entire day and night without food; hence they had to make sacrifices to ensure that they all had a meal such as

eating fewer meals and purchasing cheap and limited variety foods.

During the key informant interviews it was discovered that the food insecurity situation of households has led to other consequences for the residents of the study area. For instance, the rise in teen pregnancies: When a vulnerable household is struggling with food insecurity, the situation can create an environment where exploitation becomes more prevalent. Teenagers, particularly girls, have become targets for individuals seeking to take advantage of their vulnerability. The lack of basic needs has pushed young individuals into risky situations, contributing to an unfortunate rise in teen pregnancies within the study area. This in a cause-and-effect scenario has contributed further to increased dropout rates of girls from school. Teen pregnancies, often a consequence of food insecurity, have had a direct impact on education in the study area. Unfortunately, girls who have become pregnant at a young age have faced social stigma, financial constraints, and a lack of support, leading them to drop out of school. The cycle of poverty and limited opportunities continues as education becomes a difficult goal to achieve for these young girls.

Additionally, the key informant interview with local administration also revealed that household food insecurity within the study area has contributed to the involvement of boys in gangs. For boys in food-insecure households, the challenges they face have served to drive them towards joining gangs as a way to cope with their difficult circumstances. The lack of alternative opportunities, combined with the need to survive, has pushed these boys into a life of crime. This has not only jeopardized their future but also contributes to the cycle of violence and instability within the community. Moreover, rising depression, especially among mothers has been exacerbated by food insecurity of vulnerable households. The mental health of mothers has significantly been impacted by food insecurity. The constant struggle to provide for the family, the stress of uncertain circumstances, and the inability to meet basic needs has led to heightened levels of depression among mothers. This, in turn has affected the overall well-being of the entire family. Furthermore, the lack of consistent access to food has also created stress within the family unit. Parents face the challenge of trying to provide for their children while dealing with their own mental health problems, stemming from the persistent worry about where the next meal will come from. This stress has consequently permeated the household, affecting relationships within these vulnerable households.

The struggle for resources and the pressure of food insecurity has led to increased conflicts within households, especially among partners. The stress of not being able to adequately provide for the family can strain relationships, leading to instability in the family unit. The emotional toll of constant uncertainty can escalate tensions and result in unhealthy dynamics. In various situations it was noted that some husbands have left their homes for extended periods in search of work. The absence of a consistent male presence in the family has left children vulnerable, especially when older siblings are tasked with supervision. This arrangement exposes these children to risks and challenges, as they lack proper guidance and protection. Finally, key informant information held that the necessity for parents to spend extended periods away from home, either searching for

work or working to provide for the family, has contributed to a significant reduction in the time spent with their children. When parents do return, they are often exhausted and stressed, making it difficult for them to engage with their children emotionally and provide the necessary support and guidance.

In conclusion, these findings show the far-reaching consequences of food insecurity at the household level create a number of challenges that affect the very fabric of family life and community well-being. From the distressing rise in teen pregnancies to the dropout of girls from school, and the involvement of boys in gangs, the impact extends to the mental health of mothers and the stability of family dynamics. Increased conflicts within households, fathers abandoning families in search of resources, and the limited supervision of children further compound the difficulties. The pervasive theme is one of vulnerability, where the basic struggle for sustenance not only compromises immediate needs but also undermines the long-term prospects of individuals and communities. The findings also revealed that the status of food insecurity of households in the study area was dire since households were worried about the insufficiency of food in their households meaning they did not have enough food to feed their families, they resorted to using measures such as eating fewer and cheap varieties of food to ensure everyone in the household has something to eat.

### Conclusion and Recommendation

The study concludes that there is a substantial level of food insecurity in Nakuru Town West Sub County, specifically among the vulnerable households residing in the area, with a significant portion of these vulnerable households experiencing regular stress and anxiety about food availability. Furthermore, limitations in the ability to eat preferred foods or having a diverse range of food options forced respondents to eat foods they did not prefer due to lack of resources. This suggests a lack of variety and choice in their diets, further highlighting the level of food insecurity. Challenges experienced in accessing an adequate number of meals and eating fewer meals due to lack of resources and lack of food in the house points to a considerable level of food insecurity, with a meaningful number of households regularly experiencing insufficient food availability. The study concludes that the prevalence of concerns about food insufficiency, limited access to preferred foods and variety, eating fewer meals, and occasional instances of going without a meal indicates sizable levels of food insecurity and hence the urgent need for interventions and support mechanisms to address the food insecurity faced by these households.

The study recommends targeted interventions by the Government and its development partners aimed at enhancing food accessibility for vulnerable households, such as community-based food assistance programs including food banks, subsidized food distribution, and strengthening income support mechanisms in particular, cash transfer programs to ensure a consistent and adequate food supply for vulnerable households in poor urban areas. Further there is a need to invest in agricultural development and sustainable farming practices to contribute to long-term food availability and access solutions. Sustainable farming practices, such as urban gardening, vertical farming, and community-supported agriculture, can be explored and

encouraged to maximize the efficient use of limited urban space, ensuring a year-round supply of fresh produce. This would not only enhance food availability but also contribute to the creation of local employment opportunities, empowering community members economically. Finally, there is need to enhance collaborative efforts between Government Agencies, Non-Profit Organizations, and Local Communities to create a sustainable approach to address the root causes of food insecurity.

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