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The double burden of malnutrition in refuge settlements

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A growing number of refugee camps in Uganda as a result of war in Southern Sudan are facing a double burden of malnutrition, that is, the persistence of under-nutrition, along with a rapid rise of over-nutrition and non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, hypertension and coronary heart disease. This double burden of malnutrition has resulted from various factors including: a marked transition in dietary patterns over recent years (e.g. shifts to energy dense diets high in saturated fat, sugar, and refined foods, and away from plant-based diets); inadequate access to healthy food choices; declining levels of physical activity; and inadequate access to health care services as a result of displacement and broader social determinants. In refuge settlements and host communities in Uganda, in addition to the high levels of under-nutrition, substantial levels of overweight/obesity have also been observed. At the national level, 35% of children are stunted. The prevalence is even higher in host communities where 40% of children screened are stunted. Many low- and refuge settlements and host communities are undergoing a nutrition transition associated with rapid social and economic transitions. We explore the coexistence of over and under-nutrition at the neighborhood and household level, in a refuge settlement setting in Uganda.

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