



Research on hidden hunger cases in Bahrain 'is crucial'

By JULIA CASSANO

MORE research needs to be conducted to address the levels of hidden hunger in Bahrain, according to a leading medical expert.

The term 'hidden hunger' is used to describe vitamin and mineral deficiency. When someone's habitual diet consists of foods that lack necessary levels of micronutrients, the resulting health impacts may not always be obviously visible.

Micronutrient malnutrition has been associated with a wide range of physiological impairments, including metabolic disorders, reduced immune, endocrine and cognitive function, and delayed or inadequate physical development.

Some micronutrient deficiencies may also be an underlying cause of chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, metabolic syndrome, depression and impaired cognition.

Hidden hunger affects two billion people worldwide; however, there is no sufficient data in Bahrain to determine the number of people suffering from the condition.

King Abdullah Medical City, Manama University Medical Centre senior paediatric consultant Professor Mohammed Elbeltagi told the GDN that hidden hunger affects everyone, regardless of the country they live in and income level.

He was speaking on the sidelines of the Early Childhood Education Conference which



■ Dr Elbeltagi

concludes today at the Golden Tulip Bahrain with a series of workshops.

Topics include 'Hidden hunger in preschool children: A silent threat to development', 'Psychological and social upbringing in early childhood is the key to success in life', 'Artificial Intelligence (AI) in education', 'Theoretical framework for kindergarten - Education Ministry in Bahrain' and 'Emerging trends and technology in digital education'.

The conference has been organised by Honour Code for Pioneering Educational Training and Translation Service.

"Hidden hunger is not the amount of food a person or child is consuming, but the quality of diet, which is why it affects so many people around the world," said Dr Elbeltagi.

"A child's lack of micronutrients, such as important vitamins, iron and zinc, can lead to diseases like anaemia, hypothyroidism and cancer, and it is difficult to detect unless a patient is tested for it.

"There aren't many signs that a child has hidden hunger, because they don't show signs of discomfort as if they were hungry. This is why children, especially, need high-quality diets because their bodies and brains are developing and require a lot of nutrition."

New and alarming global estimates for micronutrient deficiencies reveals the depth and breadth of hidden hunger globally with one in two preschool children and two of three women of reproductive age have at least one micronutrient deficiency, according to findings reported in *Lancet Global Health* journal.

Though regional prevalence levels are highest in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, the paper reported surprisingly high levels of micronutrient deficiencies in high-income countries, affecting one in two women in the UK and one in three women in the US.

"Unfortunately, there isn't enough data in Bahrain to give a clear number of people suffering from hidden hunger. However, some studies do reveal the number of people with specific micronutrient deficiencies," said Dr Elbeltagi.

"Vitamin D deficiency affects around 90 per cent of children aged 10 to 18, with boys having a higher prevalence (98pc) than girls.

"In addition, low levels of iron affects up to 30pc of the population.

"The issue is that lack of these micronutrients can lead to much bigger problems, such as slowed growth, weaker im-



■ Fruit and vegetables should be part of a healthy diet

mune systems and cognitive problems," he said.

He added that without data the issue of hidden hunger in Bahrain cannot be completely

addressed, urging more medical professionals to advocate for more research.

"Collaboration between authorities is necessary to collect

more data; despite seeing many patients with vitamin D and iron deficiency in my practice, I am unable to provide a specific number due to a lack of data.

"I also believe that it would be useful to conduct screenings in Bahrain to determine some type of baseline number. However, this is difficult to perform with children; we would need to test using a non-invasive technique.

"If this was done at a school, it would also be difficult to get parents' permission to do this.

"It's important that children are fed a variety of colourful foods such as fruits, vegetables and foods packed with important vitamins and minerals. Fruits, vegetables, whole grains and healthy proteins are crucial for the food world and by adding more of them to a diet, it can help prevent micronutrient deficiencies," he added.

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Hotel to host art symposium

A SYMPOSIUM that will bring together artists from more than 22 countries to exchange experiences and engage in artistic discussions will take place in Bahrain next month.

The Third Gulf Art Symposium, organised by The K Hotel in partnership with the Bahrain Contemporary Art Association, will be held from February 6 to 11 at the hotel in Juffair.

It is one of the most significant Arab and international fora of its kind, bringing together university professors, academic artists, professionals and university students across various artistic disciplines, including painting, sculpture, ceramics, Arabic calligraphy, ornamentation and graphic design.

It will also feature a cultural agenda that includes diverse workshops and artistic seminars, alongside a cultural and tourism programme highlighting Bahrain's key attractions.

The agreement was signed by hotel chief executive Hussain Al Samahiji and association president Dr Khalil Al Madhoun.

"The K Hotel has a long-standing commitment to supporting local and regional cultural initiatives, reinforcing its role as



■ Dr Al Madhoun, left, and Mr Al Samahiji, second from left, at the signing

a leader in promoting the arts in Bahrain," the hotel said in a statement.

"This partnership under-

scores the hotel's dedication to enriching the cultural landscape and providing valuable opportunities for artistic development."



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