Household food insecurity, nutritional outcome and coping strategies: Evidence from Malaysia

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Abstract
Food insecurity is a common problem among the low-income households in the developing countries including Malaysia. Household food insecurity can contribute to nutritional deficiencies and consequently affect physical well-being of the family members. This paper aims to review studies that have given effort to measure food insecurity and nutritional status at household level in Malaysia. The paper also focuses on the coping strategies that households frequently adopt to minimize food insecurity. Literatures were identified from various sources such as journals, reports, proceedings and related documents by searching comprehensively both electronic and non-electronic databases. Based on the review of literatures, it was found that majority of the low-income households in rural communities of Malaysia suffer from some kind of food insecurity-household food insecurity, individual food insecurity or child hunger. Food insecure households usually live below the poverty line and a portion of them is categorized as hardcore poor. It was also reported that relatively higher proportion of children from food insecure households are stunting, underweight and wasting as well as women are overweight, obese and at risk waist circumference. Households suffering from food insufficiency frequently apply a variety of food and non-food related coping strategies to minimize the risk of food insecurity. Therefore, integrated efforts between agencies, communities and families are very much necessary to prevent food insecurity as well as improve nutritional status of the poor households of the country.

Key words: Food insecurity, nutritional outcome, coping strategies, household, Malaysia.

Introduction
Food security is defined as “access by all people at all times to enough food for an active and healthy life” 1. The World Bank 2 identified three pillars food security which are food availability, accessibility and utilisation. Food availability, in this case, implies having food and this entails production and storage for off-seasons; accessibility, however, implies physical and economic access to food which may be hinged on availability and having the resources to acquire or exchange for food; and food utilisation implies ensuring a good nutritional outcomes 3. According to Hamilton et al. 4 food security is the ready availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods and an assured ability to acquire acceptable foods in a socially acceptable way. Rukuni 5 has defined food security as a balance between availability of and access to sufficient food at the household level. Food and nutritional security are key issues for human wellbeing 6. Researchers, governments and private organizations working with food and nutrition in the developing countries are concerned with the nutritional status of the general people, especially children, pregnant women and lactating mothers 7, 8.

On the other hand, food insecurity is the absence of food security and applies to a wide range of phenomena, from famine to periodic hunger to uncertain food supply 9. Frongillo and Nanama 10 opines that household food insecurity results when food is not available, cannot be accessed with certainty in socially acceptable ways or is not physiologically utilised completely. Food insecurity is primarily a consequence of low household income and poverty, and not just inadequate production of food commodities 11. There is an intimate relationship between food insecurity and poverty. Food insecurity is a common problem among the low-income households in the developing countries of the world. It was reported that the number of people suffering from chronic hunger increased from below 800 million in 1996 to above 1 billion in 2009 all over the world 12.

Studies revealed that household income is the most important determinant of household food insecurity 13, 14. Besides household income, there are many other factors that contribute to household food insecurity. In many studies, low socioeconomic status of the households has consistently been shown to be a contributing factor of food insecurity 15-17. In Malaysia, Shariff and Khor 18 conducted a study to assess household food insecurity among low-income rural communities and examined its association with demographic and socioeconomic factors. The study revealed that majority of the food insecure households live below the poverty line, have a larger household size, low education level, more children and school going children and mothers as housewives.

Household food insecurity is also significantly correlated with health and nutritional status of the households. 19, 20. A study conducted by Frongillo et al. 21 in rural Bangladesh to understand the experience of household food insecurity revealed that food insecurity may affect dietary intake and ultimately nutritional status and physical well-being of the family members. Kramer and