

Can food scares shift health and nutrition outcomes in low- and middle-income countries?

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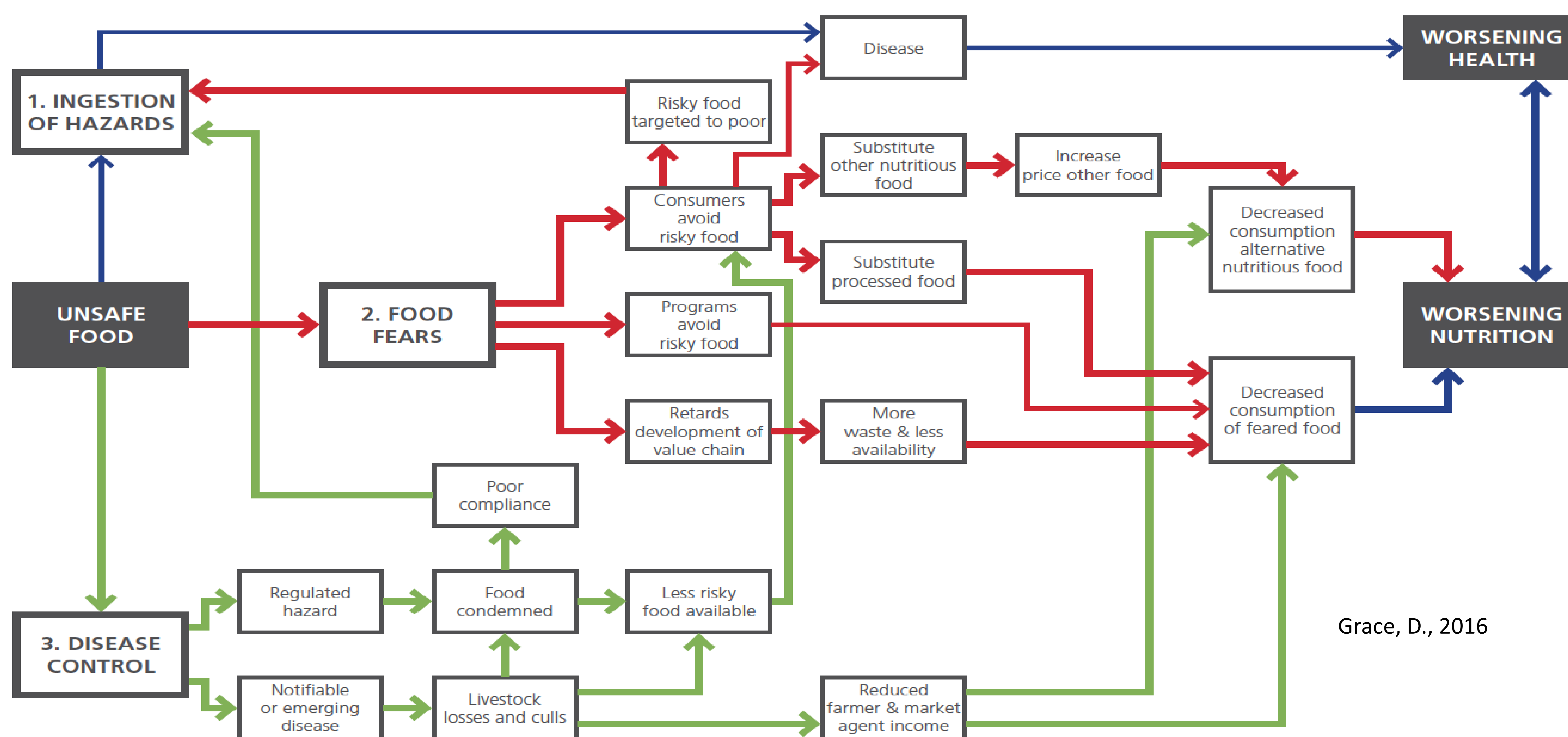
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Background

Food scares are an increasing phenomenon, related to the intensification and growing complexity of value chains, but also societal shifts associated with urbanisation, increasing wealth, improving literacy and growing connectivity: they can dramatically shift purchasing patterns and as markets become the most important sources of nutritious foods for the poor, this could influence nutritional outcomes. We report on a systematic literature review that investigates the evidence for this.

Conceptual framework

The complex pathways through which unsafe food may lead to bad nutrition and health outcomes.



Findings

- Since the year 2000, we found 30 major food scares.
- We identified 990 articles and 12 met the criteria to be included in the review: 4 were assessed as high quality.
- Food scares usually affect many more consumers than are directly made sick by incidents eliciting the scare.
- Most studies found decreased consumption of the feared food; 5 studies found additional dietary changes, including food substitutions, avoidance, and reduction in dietary diversity.
- Impacts were exacerbated by poor risk communication and amplified by media.
- Although impacts were generally short-lived, long-run effects were also reported.
- Two studies assessed nutritional outcomes, finding reasonable evidence of adverse effects.

Conclusions

- More and better research is needed on food scares and their impacts on nutrition and health.
- Existing evidence suggests that food scares are already important influencers of food consumption and likely to become more important.
- As well as transiently changing consumption food scares may shift food systems in less healthy, directions.
- Policymakers and risk communicators need to better manage information flows during a scare.

References

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