



FOOD MONITOR PROGRAM WARNS THAT MALNUTRITION AFFECTS NEARLY TWICE AS MANY WOMEN AS MEN IN CUBA

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The 2025 National Food Security Survey reveals a marked gender inequality in the effects of Cuba's food crisis. According to the gender-based analysis conducted by Food Monitor Program, the findings confirm that:

- underweight was almost twice as prevalent among women;
- women performed three quarters of all cooking-related work;
- they were also primarily responsible for managing special diets required because of illness;
- older women simultaneously faced shortages of medicines, inadequate pensions, and a disproportionate burden of care work.

These results form part of a broader deterioration in food security recorded over recent years. The proportion of respondents who reported experiencing hunger during the previous 30 days increased from 18.7% in 2023 to 24.6% in 2024 and 33.9% in 2025.

Higher prevalence of underweight among women

Among the 1,275 women and 1,228 men surveyed, with valid weight and height records, 9% of women were below a healthy weight, compared with 4.9% of men. Underweight was therefore 1.8 times more frequent among women, a statistically significant difference that remained consistent across all age groups.

This finding supports the identification of a feminization of undernutrition, not only because women show a higher prevalence of underweight, but also because they carry most of the work required to sustain household food provision under conditions of scarcity.

The higher prevalence of underweight among women persists across every age group. The difference is especially visible among younger women, but it does not disappear at later stages of life. Among those aged 18 to 25, underweight affects 12.6% of women and 8.3% of men. Among those aged 26 to 40, the respective proportions are 8.9% and 5%. The same pattern continues among people aged 41 to 60 and reappears after the age of 60, when it affects 8.4% of women and 4.8% of men.

The territorial breakdown also reveals important differences. In Las Tunas, 25% of the surveyed women with a valid body mass index were underweight. The proportion was 23.4% in Guantánamo, 21.4% in Pinar del Río, and 20.3% in Granma. These figures correspond with the

geography of underweight identified in the 2024 survey, when Las Tunas, Granma, and Guantánamo were already among the most severely affected provinces.

Relatively better-fed households, women with lower body weight

One of the survey's most significant findings is the apparent contradiction between women's nutritional status and the way they describe food conditions in their households. A total of 31.6% of women reported that they or another member of their family had gone to bed hungry during the previous 30 days. At the same time, female respondents reported the complete absence of important food groups less frequently. Among women, 7.8% stated that meat products were never consumed in their households, compared with 13% of men. In the case of vegetables, the respective proportions were 7.9% and 12.2%.

Women therefore describe households that are slightly better sustained, while presenting almost twice the prevalence of underweight. The data are consequently compatible with the hypothesis of female food sacrifice: women reducing their own portions, skipping meals, or reserving the best food for children, sick relatives, and other dependent household members.

Three out of four women cook in their households

The largest gender gap recorded by the survey appears in food preparation. A total of 74.8% of women stated that they cooked either alone or together with another person, compared with 25% of men. In addition, 61.8% of women said that they were solely responsible for cooking, while only 19.2% of men gave the same response.

When men do not cook, the task falls mainly on their partners. A total of 41.5% identified their spouse as the person responsible for preparing food, compared with only 2.8% of women who attributed this role to their partner.

When all responses are considered, a woman cooks in 92.1% of the households described by female respondents. This inequality acquires an additional dimension in households where someone requires a special diet because of illness. In those cases, the female respondent was responsible for cooking in 72.3% of households.

The task of obtaining food, however, is distributed differently. A total of 63.8% of men said that they were responsible for finding food, compared with 52.8% of women. Men also reported spending more hours each week waiting in queues, travelling, and locating products. These findings suggest that the public task of searching for food is shared or partially masculinized, while the work of transforming what is found, replacing unavailable ingredients, adjusting portions, and sustaining everyday food provision remains predominantly female.

Food-related anxiety becomes feminized in old age

Across the sample as a whole, women and men expressed similar levels of concern regarding income, food, and basic services. The gender gap appeared when the results were separated by age.

Among people over the age of 60, 94.7% of women expressed fear that their income would not be sufficient. A total of 90.7% of older women feared that food would spoil because of a lack of refrigeration. They also reported more frequently that they had been forced to alter their daily routines because of the crisis.

Older women accumulate several different forms of vulnerability. A total of 92.2% reported difficulties obtaining medicines during the previous six months, while 87.6% depended on income from a retirement pension or other pension payments.

The results expose a profoundly unequal distribution of hunger within households. In this regard, Food Monitor Program emphasizes that the feminization of undernutrition cannot be reduced to the question of who consumes less food. It describes a way of organizing scarcity in which women sustain household food provision, absorb the additional work produced by the deterioration of public services, and may ultimately set aside their own needs in order to protect others.

The observatory also warns of the serious consequences of this female dimension of the food crisis, which has traditionally been rendered invisible within households or concealed behind everyday survival practices. When the State fails to guarantee food, medicines, and care services, female sacrifice becomes a political consequence. The feminization of undernutrition in Cuba is increasing and is reproduced through numerous dynamics that are profoundly unjust to Cuban women.