

Malnutrition in pre-School children of Jaffna Society- A post - exodus statistical perspective

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Nutrition concerns have recently assumed a greater importance as individuals are increasingly concerned with nutrition. The most vulnerable members of a family are preschool children because a child without adequate nourishment is highly vulnerable to viral, bacterial, and parasitic diseases.

The data used in this study were the anthropometric measures obtained from 372 pre-school children for “Jaffna Socio- Economic Health Study (JSEHS)” conducted in 1999 in the Valikamam sector of the Jaffna peninsula. The entire people of this region were displaced in 1995 due to the operation “Rivi- Resa’ and resettled till mid 1998.

Wasting and stunting were respectively used as an alternate measure for weight-for-height to review wasting and height-for-age was used to review stunting. Birth weights and weight-for-age from growth charts were used to review acute or chronic malnutrition. Descriptive statistical analysis and multivariate statistical methods were applied to obtain the results. It was not possible to record the weights of the preschool children due to non-availability of weighing apparatus and in some places it was not possible to move such apparatus from village to village.

The investigation on birth weights reveals that about 18% of the preschool children born in this region during this period show poor nutritional status of the mother and her family. We also found that about 26% of the growth charts show unsatisfactory growth rates and hence about 26% of them were suffering by acute or chronic malnutrition. We further found that about 61% of the preschool children have been admitted to the clinics and hospitals at least once due to medical and other pediatric problems related to malnutrition.

Analysis of MUAC revealed that “severe” and “moderate” acute malnutrition was associated with 5.1% and 19.1% of the preschool children respectively. Analysis of height-for-age revealed that the children of age above 2 years had severe growth impairment and hence we can conclude that the most devastating situation arose just after exodus 1995. We further found that “severe’ and “moderate” chronic malnutrition were associated with 2.2% and 52.3% of the preschool children respectively. Hence we can conclude that the long term war and frequent exodus have caused chronic malnutrition in the Jaffna Society and this aspect needs to be seriously considered by the health authorities for immediate rehabilitation.

Key words: Malnutrition; Pre-school children; Jaffna society; Statistical analysis; Anthropometric measures