

High prevalence of under-nutrition among pre-school children from low-income groups in Colombo, Sri Lanka: Impact of low quality and quantity of nutrient intakes

M. V. D. S. I. Gunasekara, G. A. P. Chandrasekara and, K. D. R. R Silva

Department of Applied Nutrition,
Wayamba University of Sri Lanka, Kuliyaipitiya, Sri Lanka.
E-mail: anomach@yahoo.com

Child malnutrition continues to be a problem in many developing countries including Sri Lanka and it is increasingly evident that the condition is multifaceted in nature. Food consumption behaviors of children in low income and high-income groups are different. The present study aimed to assess the nutritional status and nutrient intake of pre school children from different socioeconomic groups in Colombo.

The children were classified by socioeconomic status as low income and high income, depending on their living conditions and family income level. Seventy-pre school children were selected randomly, 35 from each group. The background information was collected using an interview schedule. Three days 24-hour dietary recall was used to assess the nutrient intake and the anthropometrics measurements were used to determine the nutritional status of the subjects.

All anthropometrics measurements considered for the study were significantly different between high income and low-income groups except the height. According to the Gomez's classification, in low-income group 25.7% of preschoolers were Grade I malnourished, 51.4 % of them were Grade II malnourished and only 22.9% of were normal. However in high-income group 20% were Grade I malnourished and 65.7% were normal.

The results revealed that the mean intake of energy, carbohydrates, protein, fat; calcium, and iron, of children in the high-income group were significantly higher than low-income group ($P>0.05$). Mean energy, calcium and vitamin C intake of the children in low-income group were significantly below the recommended level ($P<0.05$).

The poor nutritional status of the children of low-income group was the consequence of nutrient intake below the recommended level. The underlying causes for this situation were low-income level of the family, poor education level of mother, type of occupation of father, high number of family members, and poor sanitation in the household. In high-income group, the nutritional status of preschoolers was comparatively better, while all the socioeconomic factors were at a higher level.

Key words: Child malnutrition; Low-income groups; Sri Lanka; Anthropometrics measurements; Food consumption patterns; Urban areas