



ANTHROPOMETRIC ASSESSMENT OF NUTRITIONAL STATUS AMONG INDIGENOUS CHILDREN OF YAKKURE, SRI LANKA

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ABSTRACT

Yakkure village in Polonnaruwa District is considered as one of the traditional habitats occupied by the indigenous people (IP) of the country: the Vedda. In 1987 they were resettled in the present locality, 'Pahala Yakkure', 5 km away from their traditional land as a result of the expansion of Mahaweli Development Project. Consequents of the restriction of their traditional subsisting patterns, poverty and ignorance have become their major social problems. From 48% of the families who received a monthly income (MI), 65% belongs to lower income category ($MI \leq \text{Rs.}15000$). A cross-sectional study of 37 Indigenous children (16 boys and 21 girls between ages 5-11), of Pahala Yakkure Village were undertaken to study nutritional status through the calculation of Body Mass Index (BMI). Anthropometric measurements were collected following house to house survey. According to the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) subjects who were falling below the age and sex specific fifth percentile ($< 5^{\text{th}}$ %ile) of the BMI Cut off Pointes were defined as undernourished. SPSS, MS Excel and BMI metric calculator for children, were used for all statistical analysis. In order to test the level of significance, t-test (independent) was used (< 0.05). Mean height of the girls were 129.5 ± 10.96 cm and boys were 128.22 ± 9.56 cm. The body weight of the boys (24 ± 7.89 kg) was heavier than the girls (23.54 ± 6.24 kg). There is no statistically significant difference in the distribution of mean height, weight and BMI between these two groups. Regardless of sex, prevalence of undernourishment among the Yakkure children was 76%. Undernourishment among girls was higher (81%) than boys (69%). Only 12% of the boys were in the obese range. Higher prevalence of undernourishment among Yakkure children is a problem to be addressed immediately to prevent future health risks. Organizing community base awareness programs on the development strategies of their socioeconomic conditions and consequences of the negligence of systematic consumption of nutritionally rich foods are vital.

Keywords: Indigenous, Yakkure, Nutritional Status, BMI, Undernourishment