

Nutritional assessment of preschool children in the plantation areas, Baddegama and Nagoda in Southern Province, Sri Lanka

N. P. Wijesinghe¹, W. A. S. S. Weerakoon², D. P. A. Dissanayaka²

¹*Department Ayurveda, Southern Province, Sri Lanka*

²*Department of Ayurveda Surgery, ENT, Ophthalmology and Gynecology, Obstetrics and Pediatric, Faculty of Indigenous Medicine, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka*

Nutrition plays a key role, especially in the first five years of a child's physical and mental development. The ages of 3-5 years are considered as preschoolers, and it is an exciting time for both parent and child. This study explores the prevalence of malnutrition among preschoolers in the plantation sector and their dietary practices and associated nutritional problems. In the modern era, most of the community in the plantation sector are Tamil. They have been isolated socio-economically, and the Tamil community showed the lowest educational levels, health, and nutrition conditions. As the preventive aspect is better than the curative aspect, paying more attention to the nutrition of the plantation sector is crucial. A sample of 68 students aged 3-5 years from PHDT-controlled preschools in Baddegama and Nagoda Medical Officer of Health areas participated in this study. After obtaining ethical approval, primary data collection was done by interviewing parents of children using a questionnaire and measuring children's weight, height, and mid-arm circumference to assess their current health status. Children's weight and height distribution were compared with those of normal healthy children. According to the Infant and Child Feeding Guidelines of Sri Lanka, 75.86% of children's weight and 43.1% of children's height were below the normal range for their ages. According to research findings, underweight was the most prominent malnutrition condition, with more than 2/3 of the estate population being underweight. The main focus of this study was to identify the prevalence of malnutrition and related nutritional problems early. The results show that skipping meals, avoiding nutritious foods and fruits, drinking too much coffee, and consuming instant and starchy foods directly affect the child's nutritional status. The most common causative factors identified for malnutrition and other nutritional problems among preschoolers are poverty, low literacy rate, a large number of family members, ethnicity, lack of food security, low economic status of parents, and wrong food habits. Thus, overall, there is a reduction in the growth of children in the Baddegama and Nagoda plantation areas of the Southern Province. Awareness programs and continued clinical assessment for preschool children and their parents will help overcome these health problems in the plantation areas.

Keywords: *Nutritional assessment, Plantation preschools, Malnutrition*