

Nutritional Status among Indigenous Females of Henanigala, Sri Lanka: An Anthropological Insight

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Malnourishment has become one of the serious problems in developing countries like Sri Lanka and is expected to be higher among lower socioeconomic populations. The present study was focused on assessing nutritional status among the adult Indigenous Females of Henanigala: one of the current villages occupied by the descendants of indigenous people (IP) of the country: the Veddas. In 1982, IP lived in Dambana, Kotabakiniya and Kandeganwila were resettled in the Henanigala C Zone affected by the Mahaweli development project.

Total of 107 adult females ≤19 years: classified in to five age groups: 19-29 years ($n = 29$), 30-39 years ($n = 37$), 40-49 years ($n = 10$), 50-59 years ($n = 14$) and 60yr+ years ($n = 17$)] were screened for anthropometric measurements following house-to-house survey. Nutritional status was evaluated using WHO recommended age specific cut-off points of body mass index (BMI=weight in kg/ height in m²). Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS and MS EXCEL. Ethical clearance for the study was taken from the Ethical Review committee of the Faculty of Medical Sciences, USJP.

More than 41% of the adult female population under study was illiterate and in 54% their occupation was paddy cultivation. Prevalence of the grade-I, grade-II and grade-III thinness among the adult females was 5.6%, 3.7% and 18.7%, respectively. The overall prevalence of underweight was 34%. Pre-obese was reported by 31% of the adult females and obese by 9.3%. Only 32% of adult females were in the normal weight range. Reasons for the higher prevalence of malnutrition among females were consumption of healthy diet below the recommended level, engaging in heavy works despite lower nutritional intakes, unawareness, poverty etc. Through awareness programs in preparing nutritional rich diet using what is available to them in their environment, maintaining good health, issues that may occur in pregnancy and childbirth, negative impact on their children, family etc., providing them with special subsidy and active intervention of responsible governing bodies would help in eliminating malnourishment among females, and through them it would benefit their whole community.

Key words: *BMI, Malnourishment, Obesity, Thinness, Vedda*