

## Nutritional Status among Children in Sri Lanka

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Malnutrition among children in Sri Lanka is still a major public health issue. Nutritional status of a child is vital in determining health of the future generation. Malnutrition in children may influence productivity, increased susceptibility to infections, slow recovery from illness, and heightened risk of adverse pregnancy outcomes in the reproductive age. Especially, nutrition intake and health status of a child in first two years of age is a key determinant of the future growth, health, and development of the child. In Sri Lanka, there had been wide differences in prevalence of malnutrition both geographically and amongst socio-economic categories of the population. Therefore, to achieve the fourth millennium development goal for Sri Lanka which is to 'reduce the child mortality', child nutrition plays a major role. The study used the data from Demographic and Health Survey in 2006-07 and National Nutrition and Micronutrient Survey (NNMS) in 2012 to explore trends and patterns in nutrition in Sri Lanka. Unit of analysis was children under five years. This cross sectional study findings shows that the nutritional statuses of children are associated with characteristics of mothers and households.

As per the NNMS 2012, 17.5% children in 6-59 months were in low birth weight. The proportion of children with low birth weight in the estate sector is twice higher than that of children in urban and rural sectors. Also, the nutritional status is consistently better in urban and rural areas than estate sector. The incidence of stunting, wasting and underweight, decrease distinctly with increases in the level of the mother's education level. Furthermore malnutrition is much more common in plantation districts and dry zone districts. Moreover, 13 % of the children aged 6-59 months suffer from stunted condition. In terms of weight-for-height, 20% of children are thin (wasted) and are acutely malnourished. In terms of weight-for age among children of similar age, 24% are underweight and 0.7 % of ages 6-59 months are overweight. According to the WHO, cut-off points specified in the NNMS, 2012 explained that, stunting is becoming a public health problem in all districts; especially in NuwaraEliya and Badulla districts. Therefore, special health and social policies should be focused on child nutrition with special attention on NuwaraEliya, Badulla and dry zone districts in Sri Lanka.

**Key words:** Children; Nutrition; Sri Lanka; Stunted; Wasted