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The prevalence of undernurition and associated factors among children aged one to five years in a rural area in Sri Lanka

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Introduction: High prevalence of child undernutrition is a well-known issue in rural areas. The objective of this study was to describe the prevalence and associated factors among children aged 1-5 years in Siyambalanduwa MOH area in Moneragala District.

Methods: A community-based cross-sectional study was conducted among 421 child-mother pairs in Siyambalanduwa MOH area using a two-stage cluster sampling method with a cluster size of 36. Children of mothers who cannot communicate in Sinhala were excluded. Data were collected by pre-tested interviewer-administered questionnaire and conducting anthropometric measurements according to WHO guidelines. Statistical analysis was done using SPSS 20. The chi-square test was used, and $P<0.05$ was considered for statistically significant.

Results: Overall 41% of children aged 1-5 years were undernourished in Siyambalanduwa MOH area. Among the study subjects 24% were underweight, 25.7% were stunted, 16.4% were wasted, 9.2% were both underweight & stunted, 6.8% were both, underweight & wasted, 0.5% were both, stunted & wasted and 9.9% were underweight & stunted & wasted. Only the low total monthly income ($P<0.001$) and low birth weight ($P<0.001$) were significantly associated with child undernutrition. Among parents or caregivers, 18.6% had good knowledge, 35.6% had favorable attitudes and 12.6% had good practices related to child nutrition. None of the above three factors were significantly associated with child undernutrition.

Conclusions and recommendations: Prevalence of undernutrition among children aged 1-5 years is high and urgent efforts to reduce undernutrition should be a priority. Future studies should focus on assessing how to reduce the burden with low-cost appropriate interventions.

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