

Prevalence of malnutrition in female undergraduates residing in hostels of university of Sri Jayewardenepura

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Obesity and overweight, under-nutrition, micronutrient deficiency and other forms of malnutrition affect millions of people worldwide. The objective of this study was to assess the prevalence of nutritional status using BMI values of undergraduates of the first and fourth years of study residing in hostels of University of Sri Jayewardenepura. The study population of this descriptive cross sectional study consisted of 662 female undergraduates in their first and fourth years of study. A self-administrated questionnaire was administered and weight and height were measured in all subjects. Mean BMI of the sample was 19.35 kgm⁻². According to Asian cut-off values, the prevalence of underweight, normal, overweight and obese were 41.1%, 47.6%, 6% and 5.3% respectively. 53.7% of 1st year and 50.9% of 4th year students were malnourished. Majority (53.6%) of the study sample were in the normal BMI category whilst similar prevalence of underweight (41.1%), less prevalence of overweight (4.1%) and obese (1.2%) were observed when WHO cut off values were used. A statistically significant difference was not seen in the academic year with regard to BMI ($p > 0.05$). Most of the studies conducted among female university students in other countries revealed that the majority (over 70%) of the students were in the normal and overweight category. In our undergraduate female student population, however, nearly half were in the under-nutrition category probably due to the low quality of meals available in the hostel canteens.

Key words: BMI, nutritional status, malnutrition

Acknowledgements: Dr. Chamalie Nahallage (warden) and sub wardens of all university female hostels.

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