Determinants of Nutritional Status among Pre-School Children in Sri Lanka

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Despite various efforts made by the successive governments to improve the nutritional status of women and children, malnutrition among pre-school children continues to be a major health problem in Sri Lanka. The objectives of this study are to measure incidence, depth and severity of malnutrition by province, sector and gender and to find out the factors affecting nutritional status of pre-school children in Sri Lanka. Data from a sample of 1,764 pre-school children, obtained from the Sri Lanka Integrated Survey conducted by the World Bank and the Department of Census and Statistics in Sri Lanka, in 1999/2000, were used for the analysis. Nutritional status of the pre-school children was measured using the weight-for-age anthropometric indicator (underweight) which reflects both long term and short term nutritional status. Multiple linear regression and multinomial logit models were used to evaluate the determinants of underweight. The results revealed that relatively higher incidence, depth and severity of underweight children are recorded in Sabaragamuwa, Uva and North Western provinces. The results of the estimations indicate that the area of residence, household size, age of the child, mother's education, birth-weight of child and household income have significant effects on the status of malnutrition. The effect of household income on reducing malnutrition appears to be small compared to other determinants. Narrowing of regional disparities through investment in infrastructure and development of human capital through education and health are recommended as possible strategies to reduce child malnutrition in Sri Lanka.

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