

The Double Burden of Malnutrition in the Philippines: Trend from National Nutrition Surveys, 1989 - 2015

The Philippines is among the Southeast Asian countries that continue to suffer from the “double burden of malnutrition,” or the co-existence of under-and-over nutrition among its people. Undernutrition greatly affects Filipino children below five years old while overnutrition was prevalent among adults aged 20 to 59 years.

The Filipino citizenry's nutritional status is defined through the conduct of National Nutrition Surveys (NNS) every five years and Updating Surveys every two to three years in between NNSs by the Department of Science and Technology's Food and Nutrition Research Institute (DOST-FNRI) utilizing a multi-stage stratified sampling design. The DOST-FNRI conducts nutritional assessment using Anthropometry, Biochemical, Dietary and Clinical methods.

Based on the latest Updating Survey by the DOST-FNRI in 2015, undernutrition among children below five is still a public health problem where stunting (33.4%) and underweight (21.5%) remained high in magnitude and severity while wasting was 7.1%. Over two decades, stunting prevalence manifested a decline from 44.5% in 1990 to 30.0% in 2013; however, it rose again to 33.4% in 2015. Underweight prevalence followed the same downward trend as stunting from 27.3% in 1990 to 20.0% in 2013 and increased again to 21.5% in 2015. Wasting prevalence was relatively unchanged. Overweight/obesity, on the other hand, was a problem of public health significance among adult Filipinos, from 16.6% in 1993 the prevalence almost doubled at 31.1% in 2015.

Using multiple regression analysis, factors that significantly influence undernutrition among children include child's age ($p<0.000$), household's wealth status ($p<0.000$), household's food security status ($p<0.003$), child's energy intake ($p<0.007$) and drinking water given to the child ($p<0.044$).

Overnutrition among Filipino adults was significantly influenced by age, sex, work status, energy intake, household's wealth status, household's food security status, presence of electricity, place of residence and physical activity). Adults belonging to age group 40-49 years old ($p<0.000$), are female ($p<0.000$), who are working ($p<0.012$), who are meeting their energy intake ($p<0.007$), who are in the richest wealth quintile ($p<0.000$), whose households are food secure ($p<0.006$), have electricity ($p<0.047$), living in urban areas ($p<0.001$) and are physically inactive ($p<0.000$) are more at-risk to overnutrition.

The double burden of malnutrition is an important concern that needs to be addressed in the Philippines. The government cannot solve the problem alone, strong partnerships and open engagement of all stakeholders from all sectors including the family are required given the important role that each play to address the malnutrition problem, especially stunting and obesity.

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