

ASSESSMENT OF NUTRITIONAL STATUS OF UNDERGRADUATES IN THE FACULTY OF AGRICULTURE, RAJARATA UNIVERSITY OF SRI LANKA

M.D.N.L. Samarathunga¹, N.W.I.A. Jayawardana¹ and A.M.K.R. Bandara²

*¹Department of Animal and Food Sciences, Faculty of Agriculture, Rajarata
University of Sri Lanka, Puliyankulama, Anuradhapura, Sri Lanka*

*²Department of Agricultural Systems, Faculty of Agriculture, Rajarata
University of Sri Lanka, Puliyankulama, Anuradhapura, Sri Lanka*

University students are one of the important fractions of a country and their nutritional status should be taken into consideration since that will affect on their cognitive performances. The objectives of this study were to determine the nutritional status of students in the faculty of Agriculture, Rajarata University of Sri Lanka and to evaluate the association between nutritional status and gender, race, physical activities, sleeping hours, food consumption pattern, family income and distance of walking and cycling. A total of 235 students consisting 84 males and 151 females age between 21- 27 yrs ($x = 24$) were recruited for the study. Height, weight and waist circumference were measured using standard methods and body mass index (BMI) was calculated. BMI cut-off values for Asians were used to categorize the participants as underweight, normal, overweight and obese. The dietary data were collected using a food frequency questionnaire and data on the level of physical activity, sleeping hours, family income were obtained using a self-administered validated questionnaire. Mean BMI and waist circumference were 20.65 ± 3.20 and 76.33 ± 9.02 respectively. The prevalence of underweight, normal weight, overweight and obesity were 25.9%, 51.9%, 19.7% and 2.5%, respectively. However, the incidence of underweight and overweight were higher among females than males. According to the waist circumference of individuals, 8.3% of males and 28.1% of females were at risk. Among the variables studied, family income, physical activities, consumption of dairy and sweets had significant impact ($p < 0.1$) on the nutritional status. However, age, gender, race, sleeping hours, distance of walking and cycling, consumption of cereals, vegetables, fruits, eggs, rice, deep fried foods, meat and fish were not significant ($p < 0.1$). Males (65.5%) were physically active compared to females (45.1%). In conclusion, underweight is the major nutrition problem among the study population while overweight and abdominal obesity among females are emerging problems.

Keywords: Nutritional status, Overweight, Physical activity, Underweight