

**PP-01-PHS****PROPORTION OF UNDERNUTRITION AND ITS ASSOCIATED FACTORS AMONG PRESCHOOLERS IN WADDUWA MOH AREA OF KALUTARA DISTRICT**

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**Background:** Undernutrition consisting of wasting, stunting, and underweight, among preschoolers is a major public health concern as it results in increased morbidity and mortality. Insights into the proportion and associated factors of undernutrition among preschoolers are imperative for effective interventions. This study was conducted to assess the proportion of undernutrition and its associated factors among preschoolers in Wadduwa MOH area of Kalutara district.

**Methods:** A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted among 263 preschoolers selected through cluster sampling in nine randomly selected preschools in Wadduwa MOH area. Data were collected by the parent/guardian using an interviewer-administered questionnaire. Weight and height of the preschoolers were measured by the investigators according to standard criteria. Factors associated with undernutrition were assessed using Chi-square test at  $p < 0.05$  significance level.

**Results:** The response rate was 100%. The prevalence of stunting, underweight, and wasting among the preschoolers were 3.8% (n=9), 0.4% (n=1), and 0.4% (n=1) respectively. Overall, 3.43% of preschoolers were categorized as undernourished and 22.81% were at risk of undernutrition. Smoking status of the father ( $X^2=4.58$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p=0.032$ ), frequent illness ( $X^2=4.26$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p=0.039$ ), and getting medications for chronic illness ( $X^2=8.81$   $df=1$ ,  $p=0.003$ ) were significantly associated with undernutrition.

**Conclusion:** The study revealed that stunting is prevalent among preschoolers, indicative of chronic malnutrition. Smoking status of father, frequent illness, and chronic illness of the child were significantly associated with undernutrition. Targeted community-based activities addressing effect of fathers' smoking on children's health and importance of adequate nutrition during illness are commended.

**Keywords:** Undernutrition, Preschoolers, proportion, associated factors, Wadduwa