

School-age Kenyans in relation to nutrition, cognition, and playground behaviors

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Abstract:

Because medical illness is associated with malnutrition, it might contribute to the poor outcomes seen in malnourished children. This study explored relations between frequency of mild illness and development in 133 mild-to-moderately malnourished school-age Kenyan children. Morbidity information was collected for one year. Concurrent assessments of cognitive status and playground behaviors were obtained. Nutritional and environmental variables were also assessed. Girls with more reported days of mild illness performed less well on developmental measures than did their healthier female peers. They were less cognitively advanced, and, on the playground, girls with more mild illness were less active, happy, and social. Furthermore, relations between frequency of mild illness and playground behaviors (but not cognitive score) in the girls remained statistically significant when other variables, such as socioeconomic status, parental literacy, food intake, and anthropometry, were considered. For the boys, frequency of mild illness was not related to cognition or play behaviors