

**NUTRITIONAL STATUS AND ITS DETERMINANTS
AMONGST SCHOOL AGE CHILDREN (6-10 YEARS)
IN A LOW INCOME URBAN COMMUNITY OF
NAIROBI.**

BY

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ABSTRACT.

The aim of this study was to determine the nutritional status and risk factors for malnutrition among school age children living in a low income urban community. It was carried out in Kibera, a shanty settlement within the city of Nairobi. It was a cross sectional, descriptive study and a total of 479 school age children (6-10 years) in 361 households were seen.

The results obtained indicated that 24.2% (112) of the children were malnourished (< 80% of the reference median weight for age), 15.8% (73) were stunted (< 90% of the reference median height for age) and only one child was wasted (< 80% of the reference median weight for height). The weights and heights for age of the children fell on the 25th percentile of the NCHS reference standards while their weights for height were close to the 50th percentile. These children were found to be nutritionally better off than their counterparts from rural Machakos and Embu.

Higher household income, higher monthly food expenditure, smaller household sizes (< 5 persons), better quality houses (cemented floors) and greater quantities of water used in the households per day were found to significantly influence the nutritional status of the children.

Better quality diets of the children were found to be directly related to higher household income, higher monthly food expenditure and higher education levels of both the mothers and heads of household. No significant relationship was found between the quality of diets and the nutritional status of the children.

Respiratory tract infections were found to be the commonest types of illnesses affecting the children. The other commoner problems being those of the skin and abdomen. Illnesses were found to contribute to a high percentage (62%) of school absenteeism. There was no significant relationship between the morbidity experience of the children and their nutritional status.

On school attendance, it was noted that the majority (85.2%) of the school age children attended school. It was however of great concern to note that out of all those who did not go to school, over 50% of them did not do so due to financial inabilities of their families to send them to school.

It was surprising to observe that the school age children in this community were not as badly off nutritionally as had been expected. The finding that they were even better off nutrition wise, than their rural counterparts needs to be confirmed in a more extensive study. This study was in support of other studies which have found that the nutritional status of children is to a large extent dependent on the socio-economic status of their families.

Raising the standard of living of low income status families will therefore go a long way to reducing malnutrition and ensure good health and well being of the present and future generations.