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**Galadari Hotel, Colombo**

*“Child Health: Navigating through crises”*

# 25<sup>th</sup> Annual Scientific Congress of the Sri Lanka College of Paediatricians

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## COMMUNITY-BASED CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY ON UNDER-5 NUTRITION AND ITS ASSOCIATION TO HOUSEHOLD FOOD INSECURITY DURING THE ECONOMIC CRISIS IN SRI LANKA

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### INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic and the economic crisis has impacted household economy and food security of the most vulnerable in Sri Lanka. This could lead to childhood malnutrition causing long-term effects on health, brain development and the human capital of the country.

### OBJECTIVES

This study assessed the proportion of children aged 6-59 months with undernutrition and the association between weight trajectory during the last 6 months and household food insecurity in selected districts in Sri Lanka.

### METHOD

This is a community-based cross-sectional study of children aged 6-59 months in Gampaha, Nuwara Eliya, Jaffna and Rathnapura districts from August to

December 2022 and the sample was selected using two-staged stratified cluster sampling. Previously validated Household Food Insecurity Access Scale (HFIAS), and Household Hunger Scale (HHS) assessed food insecurity. Univariate and multivariate analysis were performed to assess the associations of weight faltering/flattening.

## **RESULTS**

The sample included 832 subjects. In 53% monthly household income was less than the estimated living wage for 2022. Underweight, stunting and wasting were 15.1%,12.9% and 8.5% respectively and higher than the national figures in 2021 and Nuwara Eliya District had the highest rates for underweight and stunting. Moderate/severe hunger was observed in 9.6%. Moderate/severe HFAIS scores were observed in 33.7% of households and 19.5% showed a flattening/faltering of weight during the last 6 months. HFAIS and HHS scores showed a significant positive correlation ( $r=0.66$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). With multivariate regression, estate sector had three times greater weight reduction than non-estate sector (B: 2.82, 95% CI: 1.89, 4.22,  $p<0.001$ ). Also, egg/flesh food consumption was a significant predictor when adjusted (B:1.78, 95%CI:1.25, 2.65,  $p=0.002$ ). Weight faltering/flattening increased with higher HHS scores (B:1.21, 95% CI: 1.016, 1.441,  $p=0.03$ ).

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Undernutrition and food insecurity is high in this cohort. Living in the estate sector, eating less egg/flesh food consumption and higher food insecurity are associated with undernutrition in under-5 children.