

**NUTRITIONAL STATUS AND EATING HABITS AMONG PUBLIC PRIMARY
SCHOOL CHILDREN AGED 9-13 YEARS AS WELL AS NUTRITIONAL
KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICE OF THEIR PARENTS/GUARDIANS IN EDUCATION
DISTRICTS 2, 3, 4 IN ST. LUCIA**

Shirlan Rameau

Project Supervisor: Dr. Sa'eed Bawa

2014

Background: Childhood overweight and obesity has become a challenging public health problem according to the 2009 data from the World Health Organization. Nutritional disorders are common in children and one of the commonest is childhood obesity. WHO states that the whole world, including developing countries is facing a global epidemic of obesity

Objective: The aim of this: **(1)** research was to investigate the influence of parental nutritional knowledge on food selections by children aged of 9-13 years as well as: **(2)** To determine the rates of overweight and obesity among children in selected primary schools in St Lucia.

Design: Height, weights and waist measurements were obtained from 555 participants of the study. Body Mass index and percentiles established by CDC as well as the WHO growth standards charts for boys and girls 2-20 years were used to determine overweight and/or obesity. Questionnaires were administered pertaining to eating patterns and knowledge for children as well as feeding patterns and nutrition knowledge for parents.

Results: Predominate ethnicity of African descent had the highest proportion of males and females. 61.7% of females and 38.3% males in the age range 10-11 years were classified as overweight according to CDC growth charts ($\geq 95^{\text{th}}$). 60.4% and 39.6% were categorized as overweight in girls and boys, respectively ($\geq 85^{\text{th}}$). Weight to height ratio (WHtR) was highest in females in the category of over-fat 65.2% and obese 90% and males 34% and obese 10%. All participants were within cut off points of 0.5. There were positive correlations in the food selected by the Parents with those selected children $p \leq 0.05$.

Conclusion: BMI, body fat and WHtR obtained from this study indicate high prevalence of overweight among primary school children. Children showed preferences for high calorie energy dense foods and snacks even with high level of nutrition knowledge. Nutrition education and intervention programs and reevaluation of existing school feeding program are needed to address the current data on overweight and obesity in St. Lucia.