

## A SECULAR TREND IN THE GROWTH OF CHILDREN IN HIGHLANDS OF PNG

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The 160,000 Enga people are the largest language group in Papua New Guinea, living in the Lai and Lagaip River valleys and surrounding areas. The region has had contact with the outside world only since the late 1940s because of the extremely rugged terrain.

Several anthropometric studies have been undertaken to determine the nutritional status of the population and secular trends in growth. The earliest study was in 1958 (McKay 1960) when 902 Kyaka Enga children were surveyed. A subsequent study was undertaken in 1972 (Binns 1976, Binns et al. 1978) on a sample of Raiapu Enga children similar in culture and location to the Kyaka.

In 1977/78 a further survey was undertaken using standard anthropometric methods.

TABLE 1 Mean Weight (Kg) of Enga Children

AGE (YEARS)	1958	1972	1977
1	7.6	8.4	8.6
2	9.7	10.3	10.5
3	11.7	12.3	12.6
4	13.5	13.9	14.4
5		15.2	15.7
Number	902	1055	806

The increase in weight between surveys was highly significant ( $P < 0.01$ ). Similar increases were found (between 1972 and 1977) for length, arm circumference and triceps skinfold. There are many factors contributing to this trend, including national development policies, improved agriculture and education and in more recent years, a comprehensive nutrition programme.

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