

A SURVEY OF THE NUTRITIONAL STATUS OF A SAMPLE OF AFGHAN REFUGEES IN BALUCHISTAN PROVINCE, PAKISTAN

SUSAN M. MENDES AND IAN DARNTON-HILL

Pakistan has currently the biggest refugee population (2 700 000) in the world, of whom approximately 705 000 are in the Province of Baluchistan. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees, World Food Programme, the French agency AICF and the Government of Pakistan are all involved in aid programs for these people. The survey aimed to acquire baseline information on the nutrition, health and socio-economic status of the Baluchistan-based refugees, concentrating particularly on the vulnerable groups of females of child bearing age and children aged 0-5 years. Two hundred and two (202) families were randomly selected to give a total of 1261 individuals with a mean of six individuals per family. The vulnerable individuals identified comprised 65% of this population.

All mothers attempted to breastfeed. The majority of infants also received a sugar and oil mixture or cooked Bartung seeds in sugar and water on the first day of life. Colostrum is generally considered 'bad' for babies and so 43% were initially breast-fed by somebody other than the mother. Breast-feeding usually continued for 2-2½ years with 57% stopping because of a subsequent pregnancy. Weaning foods (usually started at 8-9 months) consisted of very dilute canned powdered milks, bread (Naan), rice, banana or sweetened tea.

The general pattern for mothers is early marriage and frequent pregnancies. If pregnant, 60% ate additional goat and sheep meat - considered 'good' for mother and child whereas beef was considered 'bad'. While lactating, 73% of mothers ate additional eggs and meat (except beef) for 40 d. Milk products such as curd (lassi) and kurut (local cheese) were avoided for the initial 2-3 months of lactation as 'cold and sour' foods.

Nutrient intakes were estimated by obtaining family intakes by a 24-hour recall method from the female responsible for cooking and then averaging for family members. By this method, intakes of protein, energy, iron and vitamin C were above the Pakistani RDI. Mean calcium and vitamin A intakes did not meet the RDI for pregnant and lactating women. Most foods are cooked with liberal amounts of oil, spices and onions. The staple food is naan (a wholewheat bread) supplemented by many cups of very sweet tea.

All children aged 0-5 years in the families were weighed and measured. Five % of these children were severely malnourished.

% Standard*	Satisfactory		Malnourished			Total
	>100%	99-90%	89-80%	79-70%	69-60%	
n	81	46	39	16	10	192
%	43	24	20	8	5	100

*Indian growth standards based on the Harvard standards (Stuart and Stevenson 1959). Weight for height as a percentage of standard. Sexes combined, 0-5 years.

The surveyed population appears to have an adequate nutritional status with some vulnerable individuals. The morbidity figures (not reported here) are, however, more characteristic of a developing country.

STUART and STEVENSON (1959). 'Growth Standards for Well-nourished Indian Children'. Form WFP No. 2; Project 2239. Pakistan Ministry of Health and Social Welfare.