

NUTRITION AND HEALTH OF EAST KIMBERLEY ABORIGINAL CHILDREN

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This project was established to assess the influence of increased mining, tourism and other changes in that part of north-west Australia on its Aboriginal population. It forms part of the work of the East Kimberley Health Impact Assessment Group which is sponsored by the Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies, Australian National University, Canberra; the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies; and the University of Western Australia. This information could then be used by Aboriginal Communities to design strategies in response to changes which occur.

A cross-sectional health survey of children in the Turkey Creek Community was undertaken in mid-1986 to provide background information about that Community which is near the recently established Argyle Diamond Mine.

There were 37 boys (mean age 89 months; range 10-149 months) and 43 girls (mean age 67 months; range 1-145 months) in the study; all except 2 of the children resident in the community at the time. Physical examination and anthropometry were done by a paediatrician using standard techniques and with checked, standardised scales and measuring boards. Twenty-six children (32.5%) had impaired growth (undernutrition, 17; stunting, 2; stunting/undernutrition, 6; marasmus, 1) in comparison with NCHS reference values. Eighteen children had evidence of acute or acute-on-chronic chest disease. Thirty out of 62 children (48%) had recognised parasites or bacterial pathogens in their stools. Sixteen subjects (26%) were anaemic (Hb < 11g/dl); 13 had suggestive evidence of iron deficiency and 6 had eosinophilia. Four children had hypocholesterolaemia and 4 had hyperalbuminaemia.

This study describes the current health and nutritional profile of Aboriginal children at Turkey Creek. Results suggest widespread mild to moderate undernutrition, evidence of chronic infections and a high level of intestinal parasitism and pathogen carriage.

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