

IMPROVED GROWTH OF CHILDREN IN SIMBU PROVINCE,
PAPUA NEW GUINEA

P.W.J. HARVEY and P.F. HEYWOOD

We conducted an anthropometric survey of 1,336 children under five years of age in Simbu Province, Papua New Guinea, in 1980. Children were measured at randomly selected census points throughout the province. Hanging balance scales were used for weighing and length was taken with the child supine on a baby measuring board.

Comparisons with similar data collected two decades previously show that the growth of children has improved substantially (Venkatchalam 1962; Bailey 1964). In 1980, the children of every age group were both heavier and taller than reported by Venkatchalam. The increase in mean weight at 24 months was 1.5 kg and at 5 years was 2.0 kg. Mean length had increased by 3.5 cm at 24 months and 6 cm at 5 years of age. Mean singleton birthweight for the period 1975-1980 was 3.22 kg, 0.26 kg greater than that reported for the mid-1950's. Significant changes in diet have occurred (Harvey and Heywood 1983). The contribution of protein and fat to total energy intake increased markedly. Heights and weights of mothers also increased significantly during this time period. Thus, a consistent pattern of improving nutritional status was evident in the province.

The improvements in nutritional status have occurred during a time of social and economic change. There has been increasing participation in the cash economy, provision of communications infrastructure, primary health care and opportunity for primary and secondary education.

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Community Nutrition Program 'F' Floor, Clinical Sciences Building, Royal Brisbane Hospital, Herston, Queensland, 4029.