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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Nutritional status of children and adolescents from a town in the semiarid Northeastern Brazil[☆]

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KEYWORDS

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Adolescent;
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Abstract

Objective: To evaluate the nutritional status of schoolchildren, resident in a semiarid region in the Northeastern Brazil.

Methods: This is a cross-sectional study, involving 860 children and adolescents aged from 5-19 years-old, enrolled in three public schools in the county. The selection of schools was non-probabilistic type and unintentional. The initial population, which integrated the database, was composed by 1,035 children and teenagers, and 175 students (16.9%) were excluded because of inconsistency in the anthropometric data, resulting in a sample of 860 students. The following outcomes were considered: stunting (malnutrition), overweight and obesity (overweight), being the height/age and body mass index/age (BMI/Age), indices respectively used. Children and adolescents with height <-2 standard deviations and overweight and obese weight z score ≥ 1 were considered stunted. The statistical analysis was descriptive.

Results: The prevalence of stunting and overweight/obesity was 9.1% and 24.0%, respectively. Overweight and stunting were higher in adolescents aged 15 and over, compared to other age groups analyzed. In relation to gender, malnutrition presented itself in a similar way, but overweight was more frequent among females.

Conclusions: The results revealed that excess weight, here represented by the sum of overweight and obesity, was more prevalent than stunting (malnutrition), highlighting the urgent need for attention to this problem in order to design interventions capable of contributing to the improvement of schoolchildren nutritional status.

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PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Criança;
Adolescente;
Avaliação nutricional;
Antropometria

Estado nutricional de crianças e adolescentes de um município do semiárido do Nordeste brasileiro

Resumo

Objetivo: Avaliar o estado nutricional dos escolares de um município do semiárido nordestino.

Métodos: Estudo transversal de crianças e adolescentes de 5-19 anos, matriculados em três escolas da rede pública de ensino do município. A população inicial foi composta por 1.035 crianças e adolescentes matriculados na rede, sendo excluídos 175 alunos (17%) por inconsistência de dados antropométricos, resultando 860 estudantes. Foram consideradas como variáveis desfechos, o *deficit* estatural (desnutrição) e o sobrepeso e obesidade (excesso de peso), sendo utilizados os índices altura/idade e o índice de massa corporal/idade (IMC/idade), respectivamente. Foram considerados com *deficit* estatural crianças e adolescentes com altura <-2 desvios-padrão e, com sobrepeso e obesidade, escore z do peso ≥ 1 . A análise estatística foi descritiva.

Resultados: A prevalência de *deficit* estatural e a de sobrepeso/obesidade foi 9,1% e 24,0%, respectivamente. O excesso de peso e o *deficit* estatural foi maior nos adolescentes maiores de 15 anos. Em relação ao sexo, a desnutrição apresentou-se de forma similar, e o excesso de peso acometeu mais os do sexo feminino.

Conclusões: Os resultados revelaram que o excesso de peso, aqui representados pelo somatório das duas condições - sobrepeso/obesidade -, apresentou maior prevalência que o *deficit* estatural (desnutrição), deixando clara a necessidade da atenção a esse problema para viabilizar intervenções que contribuam com a melhoria do estado nutricional de escolares.

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Introduction

Brazil is undergoing a clear process of nutritional transition marked by distinct characteristics and stages, which shows a marked increase in the prevalence of overweight and obesity at different stages of life, whereas malnutrition, among other nutritional deficiencies, still remains a health problem to overcome.¹

According to the Household Budget Survey (HBS), conducted in 2008-2009, the percentage of children with growth retardation in Brazil is 6.8%.² The height/age index is one of the indicators that helps detect child malnutrition by presenting the delay in the child's linear growth, a fact that continues to arouse the concern of health authorities and researchers in the area of child health. Paradoxically, data from this same study revealed that the prevalence of excess weight affects 33.5% of children aged 5 to 9 years, and 21.7% and 19% of male and female adolescents, respectively.

Epidemiological studies have shown that the prevalence of excess weight has surpassed that of malnutrition in all age groups and social and demographic strata. This represents a risk factor in the short and long term for the increase of non-communicable chronic diseases (NCCD), which have been shown to be more frequent and of earlier onset in contemporary society.^{3,4}

Children and adolescents are biologically more vulnerable to these diseases, and thus, as a group, they are a good indicator of the presence of nutritional disorders in the population.⁵ In this context, among the public policies of prevention and control of nutritional disorders and of

health promotion in children and adolescents, the Health at School Program (HSP) was established through a presidential decree, as a result of a partnership between the Brazilian Ministries of Health and Education.

This policy aims to expand health interventions among students from public schools, as well as the evaluation of health status, health promotion, and disease prevention.⁶

This study aimed to assess the nutritional status of schoolchildren, participants of the School Health Mobilization Week, in Maribondo, a city located in semi-arid Northeastern Brazil, promoted by the HSP in 2012, and to compare the nutritional profile of this group with that established by the reference curves proposed by the World Health Organization (WHO).⁷

Method

This was a cross-sectional study, conducted based on data from the 1st School Health Mobilization Week of the HSP in Maribondo, a municipality in the state of Alagoas, in semi-arid Northeastern Brazil.

Maribondo is a small Brazilian city, whose population is estimated at around 14,000 inhabitants in an area slightly larger than 171 km², which has a Human Development Index (HDI) of 0.64, calculated according to the Atlas of Human Development/UNDP.⁸ The HDI in the semiarid region is less than 0.65 in approximately 82% of the municipalities, with a deficit in regard to income and education indicators, among others. The municipality of Maribondo has an urbanization of 73.3%, and approximately 50% of the population

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