

Correlation between nutritional status and physical fitness of elementary school children 10 to 12 years of age

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Abstrak

ABSTRACT

There is a growing interest in physical fitness lately, for physical fitness is believed to be important throughout life, to develop and maintain functional capability, to meet the demands of living and to promote optimal health (ACSM, 1968.). Physical fitness implies health plus, that is the extent to which a child or an adult is free from illness and free to work or play with maximum vigor and endurance (HALSEY & FOSTER, 1973). The interest in the physical fitness of children has also been increasing since the past decade (BARR-OR, 1989).

As a matter of fact, being physically fit is relative to the tasks in which the individual must engage. For physical fitness is mostly related to muscular work, it should be noted that some degree of muscular activity is indeed required in all kinds of work, even the most intellectual occupations. Therefore, its importance is undoubtedly true in all walks of life (ASTRAND & RODAHL, 1987).

In order to attain the desired physical performance, i.e. being fit, the human body, a biological machine, needs food for fuel. It is thus logical to expect that nutrition may well play a role in physical performance (THITGEY, CATALDO, ROLFES, 1987). Some studies have indeed supported the assumption. SATYANARAYANA et al (1977) demonstrated the relationship between body size and work output in male industrial workers. Several other studies on young boys and adolescents showed similar relationship. The subjects, recorded as having been malnourished in their early childhood, failed to perform as expected (SATYANARAYANA et al, 1979; SPURR, et al, 1983). It is then generally considered that individuals with low body weight and height may not have reached their full genetic potential as a consequence of inadequate food intake in early childhood, leading to lower capacity to perform their daily tasks.

While some findings have shown the adverse effect of under nutrition on the physical performance of the individuals later in life, little is known as to how far nutrition influences physical fitness during childhood. The idea is, the earlier the adverse effect is detected, and the sooner actions can be made. Unfortunately, data about this subject are scanty. Some experts, however, have put forward the emphasis on the well-being of a specific group - the school children, in particular those at elementary schools (ADAMS et al, 1961; AGARWAL et al, 1987).

It has been long recognized that the elementary school period is the most decisive stage in a person's life as it is at this particular time that many important norms are implanted on the learners. Moreover, the elementary school years are nutritionally significant because this period is a preparation for the rapid growth of adolescence (Mc WILLIAMS, 1974; WENCK, BAREN, DEWAN, 1984).

In the case of nutrition and physical fitness of elementary school children, the whole school community - parents, teachers, and school children -- is concerned. This is in line with the Alma Ata Declaration which states that people have the right and duty to participate individually and collectively in the planning and implementation of their healthy care (WHO, 1978). This concept has been adopted by the Indonesian government and it is reflected in the Indonesian National Health System (MINISTRY ON HEALTH R.I., 1982). The WHO-based declaration reflects the growing conviction that an individual choice of healthy lifestyle is the key factor and that emphasis should be placed on the positive actions that individuals and communities could take to maintain and promote health (STROOT, 1989). As a rule, healthy lifestyle is best to be taught during the elementary school period; but actions, nevertheless, can be expected when base-line information has been available. Only then it is hoped that parents will be convinced that "academic" performance, which has sometimes been overemphasized, would?