

## LOW BIRTH-WEIGHT: AN INDICATOR OF CHANGES IN SOCIO-ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

A. L. M. Abdul Gafoor  
(Statistical Unit, University of Colombo)

A child weighing less than 2,500 grams at birth is defined as Low Birth Weight (LBW). Various factors, such as genetics, social habits, nutrition, health care, etc., affecting the foetus at different stages of its development, contribute to its weight at birth. In developing countries nutrition and health care are found to be the dominant factors. A higher proportion of LBW children in a given community indicates a low level of nutrition and health care to the mother and in turn to the community. It has been claimed that the proportion of LBW to total children born is a more realistic indicator of the material well-being of a community than, for example, the GNP or per capita income. A low percentage of LBW children indicating that basic material requirements of the community are being met.

A study was carried out in the three major maternity hospitals of Colombo, relating to the period 1 Jan. 1979 to 30 April 1979, covering a total of 9,955 births. Basic Statistics have been computed. The percentage LBW children in Colombo is then compared with that in certain selected countries. It is also compared with some other indicators of economic and social development such as GNP, infant mortality rate, physical quality of life index, etc.

It is claimed that not only is LBW a generally good indicator of the state of socio-economic environment but that, read in conjunction with other indicators, it helps to point out the areas where corrective action is necessary. In addition it is a quicker indicator of changes in the socio-economic environment and one easy to measure and monitor, thus enabling appropriate action to be taken in time.

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