

A-43: The body mass index of young adults in Sri Lanka

S T C Mahawithanage¹, H Peiris¹, A R Wickremesinghe²

¹Dept of Biochemistry and Family Medicine, Faculty of Medicine, University of Sri Jayewardenepura ²Dept of Community Medicine, University of Sri Jayewardenepura)

Body Mass Index (BMI) has been identified as the most appropriate anthropometric indicator of assessing nutritional status of adults. The BMI of an

individual could be affected by many factors including different types of physical activities. This study was undertaken to elucidate the effect of physical activities on BIM of a selected adult population in Sri Lanka.

A total sample of 646 students (255 males and 391 females) from among new entrants to the University of Sri Jayewardenepura for the academic year 1996/1997 was selected for the present study. The measurements were taken within 2 weeks of admission to reduce the effect of adaptation to a new environment. Heights and weights were taken to the nearest 0.1 kg and 0.1 cm respectively using a platform beam balance. Measurements were obtained according to the WHO guidelines. Students engaged in different physical activities during the last 2 years were identified using a self-administrated questionnaire and were categorised into 4 groups as those engaged in sports, heavy work, moderate work and no activities. The data was analysed using EPIINFO and SPSS statistical packages.

Mean BMI of the males (19.4 ± 2.2) was significantly higher than ($p < 0.001$) that of females (18.7 ± 2.7). Most of the students were 19 to 22 years of age. Mean BMI of sportsmen was 20.6 ± 2.6 which was higher than that of other categories. However, this difference was marginally significant ($p = 0.0512$). In sportswomen such an observation was not evident and their mean BMI was 18.6 ± 1.7 . Furthermore, a sex difference was observed between sportsmen and sportswomen ($p < 0.001$). This study suggested that sports does not appear to have a major contributory effect on BMI among females in the study group.

Financial assistance by the Department of Biochemistry, Faculty of Medical Sciences, University of Sri Jayewardenepura is acknowledged.