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ENERGY NUTRITION OF IBAN IN SONG AND KANOWIT FEBRUARY - APRIL 1990

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SUMMARY

his report describes the results of a survey of the nutritional health of Iban from 24 longhouse villages in Song and Kanowit Districts during February to April 1990. The principal findings are: 1. Kanowit District clinic records of child nutritional status may have significantly underestimated the prevalence of low weight-for-age. 2. The growth performance of children aged 2-9 y in Kanowit appears to be slower than that of children in Song. 3. A concentration of respiratory morbidity in Kanowit, affecting children and adults of all ages, significantly contributes to this pattern. 4. Kanowit men aged 18-40 are shorter in stature than those in Song. 5. There is evidence for chronic energy deficiency in adults aged over 45 y, with a prevalence probably exceeding 10% and rising with age, particularly in women. This is significantly influenced by morbidity independently of the ageing process. 6. Resting energy expenditure in men and women significantly exceeds that predicted by internationally recommended methods, and requires further study. 7. Further investigation is required to substantiate and explain marginal evidence that Kanowit men have greater physical capacity for work than men in Song, and to elucidate the implications of variable physical fitness for household income from subsistence activities.

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This report describes the results of a survey of the nutritional health of Iban from 24 longhouse villages in Song and Kanowit Districts during February to April 1990. The principal findings are: 1. Kanowit District clinic records of child nutritional status may have significantly underestimated the prevalence of low weight-for-age. 2. The growth performance of children aged 2 – 9 y in Kanowit appears to be slower than that of children in Song. 3. A concentration of respiratory morbidity in Kanowit, affecting children and adults of all ages, significantly contributes to this pattern. 4. Kanowit men aged 18–40 are shorter in stature than those in Song. 5. There is evidence for chronic energy deficiency in adults aged over 45 y, with a prevalence probably exceeding 10% and rising with age, particularly in women. This is significantly influenced by morbidity independently of the ageing process. 6. Resting energy expenditure in men and women significantly exceeds that predicted by internationally recommended methods, and requires further study. 7. Further investigation is required to substantiate and explain marginal evidence that Kanowit men have greater physical capacity for work than men in Song, and to elucidate the implications of variable physical fitness for household income from subsistence activities.

Introduction

1. During the 1980s, nutritional surveillance in Sarawak largely consisted of the recording by local clinics of the weights of children less than 6 years' age. An overall view of the nutritional health of such children in the State suggests that, over the period 1983 to 1987, there was a steady fall in the proportion of the child population showing poor health (Fig. 1). Although this pattern was common both to urban and rural areas, there was significant variation between Districts in the overall magnitude of the problem. In particular, Song District, in the Kapit Division, showed consistently high levels of child undernutrition in marked contrast to the neighbouring District of Kanowit (see Map 1).

2. This paper reports the findings of a preliminary field survey of the nutritional health of the Iban population in Song and Kanowit Districts. The survey was intended to address four general issues. These were as follows.

3. First, it was intended to assess to what extent clinic nutritional surveillance represents the District child population as a whole. Second, it was therefore

Fig. 1 Prevalence of moderately to severely underweight (<81% W/A) children aged 0 to 6 y in Sarawak 1983 to 1987. (Source: Department of Medical Services).

