



Australian Population Association

12th Biennial Conference

population and society: issues, research, policy

15-17 September 2004 - Canberra, Australia

Nutrition and health of children in Timor Leste

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Abstract

Timor Leste is the world's newest nation, but also one of the poorest. There was extensive destruction to national infrastructure, displacement of families and economic disruption at all levels during the post-referendum violence in 1999. Efforts to reconstruct the health care system and develop a national health plan have been constrained in part by the paucity of credible demographic, health and nutrition data.

Nutritional status of children is an important determinant of their health and well-being. Poor nutritional status in children under five years of age is associated with an increased risk of child morbidity and mortality. In the TL 2003 DHS nutritional status of children was assessed by weight and height measurements which were used to construct anthropometric indices to adjust for age and sex differences in child growth.

Measurements were collected from 5445 children under 5 years, and 52% had evidence of chronic malnutrition or stunted growth (height-for-age $< - 2$ SD). Stunting was highest (67%) in a cohort of children aged 30 to 42 months whose mothers were pregnant and gave birth in 1999 or 2000, and may reflect the impact of political and social disruptions at that time. The prevalence of acute malnutrition was also high (12%) and in the rural west region exceeded 16%, a level indicating severe acute food shortages.

The paper will explore the relationships between child malnutrition, morbidity and mortality in Timor Leste.

Paper prepared for the 12th Biennial Conference of the Australian Population Association, 15-17 September 2004, Canberra.

