Research Summary

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Data focus:	MALAMPA

Title   Malnutrition in Remote Vanuatu: Cyclone Response Survey

Abstract

Malnutrition in Low and Middle Income Countries is established. However, devoting the time, human capital and money to defining the degree of the problem is difficult when in low-resource settings. Better identifying vulnerable regions can lead to better understanding contributing factors and interventions. Here we take anthropometric data collected in the field during recovery efforts after Tropical Cyclone Harold as a random sample from one remote area in provincial Vanuatu. The emergency medical team, including a paediatrician, encouraged all children within the catchment area to come with medical concerns and for administration of deworming, vitamin A and micronutrient packets. In total, the paediatrician assessed 268 children over 6 days. Review of weight-for-age data demonstrated that of the 218 children under age 5 years, 91 (42%) were 2SD below the median (classified as malnourished) of which 43 (20%) also fell 3SD below the median (severely malnourished). Geographic review of the results taken at four sites demonstrated a hotspot with 57% malnourished/34% severely malnourished at the most remote survey site. Study weaknesses include a small catchment radius (5 km), possible dehydration days after the cyclone, no availability of length or skinfold measurements and possible selection bias toward children most needing attention. Nonetheless, this study demonstrates a higher rate of undernourished children in one remote region than what has previously been appreciated. It serves to demonstrate a novel use of recovery data after a natural disaster, the need to identify vulnerable populations with greater granularity. It also highlights the need for immediate nutritional support after natural disasters as deaths from severe malnutrition in cyclone aftermath are likely not routinely captured or attributed to the event.