Abstract

Objective. To compare the prevalence of undernutrition and anemia in indigenous and non-indigenous children <5 years of age at the national level, by region and by urban and rural areas, and to evaluate the degree to which the socioeconomic condition of the family predicts the differences. Material and Methods. A national probabilistic survey was conducted in Mexico in 1999. Indigenous families were identified as those in which at least one woman 12-49 years of age in the household spoke a native language. The prevalence of undernutrition (stunting, wasting and underweight) and anemia was compared between indigenous and nonindigenous children. Probability ratios (PR) were used to compare prevalences in indigenous and non-indigenous children adjusting for socioeconomic status (SES) of the family and for other covariates. Results. The prevalences of stunting and underweight were greater in indigenous than in nonindigenous children. At the national level and in urban areas the prevalences were three times greater and in rural areas ~2 times greater (p<0.05). No differences were found in the prevalence of wasting (p>0.05). The prevalence of anemia in indigenous children was one third greater than in non-indigenous children at the national level (p<0.05) and was between 30 and 60% greater in urban areas and in the regions studied (p<0.05) but was not statistically significant (p>0.05) in rural areas. These differences were reduced to about half when adjusting for SES but remained significantly higher in indigenous children (p<0.05). Conclusions. Indigenous children have higher probabilities of stunting and underweight than non-indigenous children. The differences are larger in urban areas and in higher socioeconomic geographic regions and are explained mostly by socioeconomic factors. The overall difference in the probability of anemia is small, is higher only in urban relative to rural areas, and is explained to a lesser degree by socioeconomic factors. Policy and programs should be designed and implemented to reduce the dramatic differences in nutritional status between indigenous and non-indigenous children in Mexico. The English version of this paper is available too at: http://www.insp.mx/salud/index.html

Keywords

indigenous children under five years of age; undernutrition; stunting; wasting; anemia; Mexico.