ABSTRACT

The present study assessed the nutritional status and prevalence of stunting in 6 - 9 year old primary school children. Four thousand five hundred and seventy school children boys and girls were selected from Ahwaz city, Iran (n=2232) and Mumbai city, India (n=2332). Anthropometric measurements and food frequency questionnaire were used to examine nutritional status, diet patterns and dietary diversity of the children. A small percentage of Iranian children (0.2%) and 3.2% Indian children had weight for age z-scores below -2 SD. Only 1.5% Indian children and 5.4% Iranian children had height for age z-scores below -2SD. In India, the percentage of wasted children was more than in Iran. Only 1.7% Iranian and 4.1% Indian children were wasted (weight for height <-2SD). Among Indian children, 1.3% had weight for height z-scores > +2SD compared to 3.6% Iranian children. Prevalence of stunting and underweight as well as overweight/obesity in both countries was higher when percentiles were used to assess nutritional status. The percentage of stunted children was more in Iran than in India, and a slightly higher percentage of Iranian children tended to be overweight / obese compared to Indian children.

The results indicated that socioeconomic factors such as higher monthly family income, better housing, small family size, higher parental education, better health status, more number of meals and consumption of breakfast positively affected child nutritional status. However, eating outside foods and anemia showed negative association with nutritional status.

Dietary diversity scores were higher among those children who were fed better and who were from better socioeconomic backgrounds and whose parents were better educated in both countries. Overall significant differences were observed between the two countries for their diversity scores of 11 individual food groups. Data indicated the need for improving dietary diversity in school aged children.