

SOLOMON ISLANDS

Population¹	428 840	Infant mortality rate¹	28.0 per 1000 live births
		Life expectancy at birth¹	65.0 years
		Fertility rate¹	4.05
		Annual population growth rate¹	2.8%

NUTRITIONAL OVERVIEW

Solomon Islands has made significant advances in nutrition, including the development of a National Food and Nutrition Policy in 1992 and a Breast-Feeding Policy in 1995. However, inappropriate child feeding practices and overnutrition, especially among the urban population, are of increasing concern.

NUTRITIONAL PROBLEMS

Birth weight

In 1998, 11% of infants were born with a low birth weight (<2500 g).

Infant feeding

The 1989 National Nutrition Survey showed that 100% of infants were being exclusively breast-fed at three months of age. At the age of 21 months 50% were still being breast-fed.

The 1998 Honiara Breast-feeding Survey showed that 65% of 210 mothers were exclusively breast-feeding at four months.

A third of mothers withhold colostrum.

The National Census Report (1999) showed that, among all the mothers who breast-fed, 33% were exclusively breast-feeding their last child for three months and 34% for four months. Nearly one quarter of all breast-feeding mothers gave exclusive breast-feeding for more than four months and only 8% did so for less than three months.

Child growth.

The 1989 National Nutrition Survey showed that 23% of children of four years and below were underweight (below 80% weight-for-age), 12% were stunted (below 80% height-for-age) and 21% were wasted (below 90% weight-for-height).

In 1998, a national survey covering 9594 children under five years of age indicated that 1.5% were underweight (below -2SD weight-for-age).

Nutritional anaemia

The 1989 National Nutrition Survey, conducted among 5444 women, revealed that 29% of non-pregnant women were anaemic, 1% severely (Hb<8 g/dl), 5% moderately (Hb<10 g/dl) and 23% mildly (Hb<12 g/dl).

Among pregnant women, 30% were classified as anaemic, 7% severely (Hb<9 g/dl) and 23% moderately (Hb<11 g/dl).

¹ Western Pacific Region Health Data Bank: 2002 Revision. Manila, WHO, 2002.

The 2001-2002 study on helminthiasis among schoolchildren, showed a prevalence of anaemia (Hb <11.5 g/dl) of 25.8% and 36.3% in two different schools¹.

Vitamin A deficiency

A 1991 survey, conducted in three provinces by the Ministry of Health and Medical Services in collaboration with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Vitamin A Field Support Group, showed that the prevalence of night-blindness was 0.52%, and of Bitot's spots, 1.42%.

Obesity

The 1989 National Nutrition Survey of 5444 women reported that 33% were overweight (BMI 25-29.9) and 11% were obese (BMI>30).

POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES DIRECTED AT NUTRITION

The National Nutrition and Food Production Policy was endorsed by the Government in 1998 and replaced the 1994 National Food and Nutrition Policy. The National Plan of Action was finalized in 1995. Although the Plan is still in draft form, most activities are already being carried out by various organizations and sectors within the Government.

The multisectoral National Food and Nutrition Committee, established in 1990, included members from ministries such as Health, Agriculture, Education, Commerce and Employment, as well as nongovernmental organizations and churches. However, this committee ceased to function in 1995 and attempts to revitalize it have been unsuccessful.

The National Dietary Guidelines have been drafted and will be launched by the end of 2004.

Breast-feeding policies

The National Breast-feeding Policy was endorsed and implemented in 1996. This was preceded by the Baby-friendly Hospital Initiative, which was launched in 1995. Out of all government hospitals only the National Referral Hospital has a certificate of commitment to become baby-friendly. Basic training in breast-feeding, including counselling skills, as both pre- and in-service training for health workers, has continued over the last 10 years.

The International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes has not yet been adopted, but there is a voluntary agreement with baby-food manufacturers.

World Breast-feeding Week is celebrated and media campaigns are ongoing. Information materials have been developed for mothers and mother support groups are active.

The recent National Census Report (1999) showed that 45% of women participated in the paid labour force. Maternity leave is 12 weeks on full pay in both the public and private sectors.

Monitoring and surveillance of nutritional status

The Ministry of Health and Medical Services routinely collects information on weight-for-age of children up to five years of age. Special studies are carried out to gather information on the nutritional status of woman and children.

¹ Hughes R. *Environmental influences on helminthiasis and nutritional status among Pacific Schoolchildren*. Not yet published. For the purpose of this study, country government selected two schools to be surveyed, one from the capital or commercial centre and the other less accessible. Approximately 150 children aged 5-12 years of age were selected from each school.

Intervention programmes.

The Health Education Division of the Ministry of Health and Medical Services conducts promotional and educational activities, such as Breast-feeding Week, World Food Day, workshops and training sessions, in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, the Ministry of Education, nongovernmental organizations and churches.

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