



Hygieia

MALNUTRITION IS WIDESPREAD IN UK CHILDREN

Undernutrition and obesity are strongly associated with social deprivation in UK children. Researchers collected data on almost 75 000 children, with body mass index (BMI) used to define undernutrition (BMI <2nd centile), obesity (BMI >95th centile), and severe obesity (BMI >98th centile). The frequency of all three was much higher than expected; 3.3% of children were undernourished, 8.5% were obese, and 4.3% were severely obese. The most deprived families were most significantly affected. The severely adverse consequences of early malnutrition dictate that comprehensive and effective public health strategies are urgently required if the current drastic situation is to be improved. (*Arch Dis Child* 2003;**88**:671–5)

UK TYPE 2 DIABETES PREVALENCE

Type 2 diabetes is extremely rare in 10–19 year old people, but is more common in south Asians and may be linked with social deprivation. Data were collected on every diabetes clinic attendee under 30 years old in the Leeds Health Authority, UK. From a total of almost 700 eligible patients, only 5% had type 2 diabetes, of whom 24% were south Asian and 87% were from the two least affluent areas of the region. The authors now plan to investigate this cohort further, with particular reference to diagnostic specificity and clinical outcomes, including diabetic control. (*Arch Dis Child* 2003;**88**:676–9)

BIRTH AND BIRTH WEIGHT IN NORTH WEST ENGLAND

Social inequality in birth trends is increasing in north west England. Researchers examined the numbers and weight of almost 50 000 live births and allocated each a deprivation score based on area of residence. Singleton births fell by 12% overall, but the fall in the most affluent area was three times that in the most deprived. Mean birth weight in the most deprived area was 141 grams lower than in the most affluent, showing that previously described social inequalities persist in this area of England. (*Arch Dis Child Fetal Neonatal Ed* 2003;**88**:F421–5)

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MALTREATMENT MAY BE OVERDIAGNOSED

The association between maltreatment and sudden unexpected death in infancy (SUDI) may be lower than previously estimated. All families in a UK region who lost a baby from SUDI between 1982 and 1986 were followed up until 2000. Sixty nine families experienced a total of 72 unexpected deaths, two of which raised maltreatment issues. Three families had other children subsequently placed on the Child Protection Register due to likely problems of maltreatment at the first SUDI. These figures are lower than previous estimates, and the author suggests that child protection investigation is necessary in limited cases, namely in those families where a second SUDI occurs or where an apparent life threatening episode occurs in a second child after a first SUDI. (*Arch Dis Child* 2003;**88**:699–701)

ROMAN RISK FACTORS

Eczema and breast feeding for less than three months are risk factors for type 1 diabetes in a southern European population, as is maternal infectious disease in pregnancy. Researchers used a case-control study of 150 type 1 diabetes patients and 750 controls to measure the exposure to environmental risk factors in and around Rome, Italy. Their findings generally match that of other studies on white Europeans, except for the new association of eczema and no significance found in patients with coeliac disease. The authors suggest that “such variance reinforces the idea that the same environmental risk factor may have a different impact on different Caucasian populations”. (*Arch Dis Child* 2003;**88**:695–8)

CHILDHOOD DISABILITY TRENDS IN FRANCE

Knowledge of severe childhood disability trends is potentially very useful, especially for health policy planners and care providers, yet little information exists. Recent research from France has helped plug the gap by examining such trends between 1980 and 1991 in one county. The authors found that an increase in cerebral palsy and severe psychiatric disorders were mainly responsible for a significant increase in overall prevalence. The rate of autism doubled (most probably because of classification bias) while the rate of severe mental retardation remained stable, as did that of severe visual deficiency. (*Arch Dis Child* 2003;**88**:114–17)

TOBACCO TAX AND CONSUMPTION IN AUSTRALIA

The late 1990s in Australia witnessed the most comprehensive anti-tobacco campaign ever run in the country, known as the National Tobacco Campaign. Part of the campaign was a series of tax reforms, which included a shift from taxing tobacco by weight to taxing it by stick, thus having an impact on the “budget” brands especially. The effect was dramatic; both average recommended retail price (RRP) and actual price rose by 25%, the new taxes making life tough for specialist tobacconists who formerly sold at well below the RRP. During the period of reform, smoking prevalence and reported consumption dropped, especially for the “budget” brands, thus reinforcing previous research that suggests lower socio-economic groups are more responsive to price increases than health advice. (*Tobacco Control* 2003;**12**(suppl II):ii59–66)

SMOKING PREVALENCE IN AUSTRALIA

There has been a continual decline in smoking prevalence in Australia since 1980, across both sexes, all ages, and all occupation groups. Researchers used national surveys to collect data, with personal interviews held every three years between 1980 and 2001. Respondents were grouped by age and also by occupation, with each classified as one of upper or lower white collar, or upper or lower blue collar. Overall prevalence dropped from 35% to 21%, with much of the decline observed in blue collar workers. The proportion of upper white collar smokers was significantly lower than in the other occupational groups, except in 1980, and both age and gender differentiation declined during the study period. (*Tobacco Control* 2003;**12**(suppl II):ii67–74)

ACCUMULATED HAZARDS OF SMOKING

The accumulated hazards of smoking are greatest for men in industrialised countries in Europe, North America, and the Western Pacific. Researchers in Australia calculated the accumulated hazards for different world regions by modifying an existing equation to deliver population lung cancer mortality in excess of that of never-smokers in each area examined. In developing countries, young and middle aged men were most at risk—particularly those in Latin America and Asia, reflecting recent uptake trends. The accumulated hazards were low for women except in North America, and for young and middle aged women in Europe, Latin America, and the Caribbean. (*Tobacco Control* 2003;**12**:79–85)