

Nutritional Status in Puerto Rican Slum Area



Barriada Juana Matos, Cataño 1960s
Image courtesy of Jesús Rodríguez-Benabe

Note: This image should not be confused with *El Fanguito* which was located in the *Martin Peña Canal* area of the 1950s.

In reference to an article recently appearing in the PRHSJ: *The Healthy Eating Indices of Puerto Rican families, 1961 to 1966: A retrospective study, calculated using data from previous Nutritional Surveys* (1), one additional survey was undertaken but has yet to be included in our retrospective studies. This title is *Nutritional status in Puerto Rican slum area* (2). Perhaps, in today's terminology, the title would read "economically depressed" in place of "slum" but when we compare the definition of "slum" to the actual conditions describing the area, the similitude is striking. *Dictionary* (3): Slum is a highly populated urban residential area consisting of densely packed housing units of weak build quality and often associated with poverty. The infrastructure in slums is often deteriorated or incomplete, and they are primarily inhabited by impoverished people. *Actual description* (2): "The living and sanitary conditions were very poor. Most of the homes were small, built closely together and made of poor-quality wood, zinc or cardboard. The place was swampy, particularly during rainy days and foul-smelling ponds and trenches containing heavily contaminated water could be seen everywhere. There was no sewer system and overflowing manholes were common." The community surveyed was in the urban municipality of Cataño, which is located across the bay from San Juan. Procedures of the survey have been described (1). A difference in the nutritional component was the absence of quantitative amounts of foods. Instead of a numerical value, portions were listed as "small", "frequent or infrequent" and "not measured." Although a food frequency questionnaire was administered which contained a greater variety of foods than rural areas, no calculation of nutrient composition could

be made without knowing portion sizes. The survey team was able to determine caloric consumption, which was below the recommended amounts. Dietary data was reported. "Most of the families consumed coffee, rice, fresh milk, and seasonings, such as onions and tomato sauce almost every day. Other foods eaten frequently were bread, pork, avocados, beans and eggs." Composition of the meals was further reported which was the equivalent of those previously described by Puerto Ricans living in this frame of time (1).

Due to absence of quantitative information, neither the nutritional status nor the Healthy Eating Index could be determined. Given the information in the survey, both these topics would be likely to have results resembling more those of the isolated municipalities than those of the Master Sample because of the low caloric intake.

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References

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3. Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (10th ed.). (1999). Merriam-Webster Incorporated.