

RURAL-URBAN DISPARITIES IN DIETARY HABITS AND ANTHROPOMETRIC INDICATORS AMONG CHINESE STUDENTS

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Abstract. A “poverty belt” surrounding Beijing has formed, consisting of 2.7 million rural residents who live below the poverty line residing in nearly 4,000 villages of 32 Hebei counties adjacent to Beijing. This study examined disparities in dietary habits and anthropometric indicators between Chinese students living in Beijing metropolitan area and those in the rural “poverty belt” surrounding Beijing. Multivariate linear, negative binomial, and logistic regressions were conducted to estimate differences in dietary habits and anthropometric indicators between urban and rural students. Students ($N = 646$) from four primary and middle schools were surveyed, two located in Beijing metropolitan area and the other two within the rural “poverty belt” surrounding Beijing. Rural students on average consumed fruit and vegetables 1.93 times less than their urban counterparts in the past week; whereas they consumed sugar-sweetened beverages 1.30 times and junk foods 4.98 times more than their urban counterparts in the past week. The waist-to-hip ratio of rural students was on average 0.04 higher than that of their urban counterparts. In subgroup analysis by sex, no urban-rural differences in body mass index, overweight/obesity rate, waist circumference, waist-to-hip ratio, or body fat percentage were identified among boys; whereas the waist circumference and waist-to-hip ratio of rural girls were on average 5 cm and 0.06 higher than urban girls, respectively. In conclusion, rural students had noticeably poorer dietary habits and worse weight-related health indicators than their urban counterparts. Improving diet quality among Chinese rural students is essential in reducing rural-urban health disparities.

Keywords: rural health, diet, body weight, China

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