



## CROSS SECTIONAL ASSESSMENT OF HEALTH CONSCIOUSNESS AND FOOD SAFETY PRACTICES AMONG SCHOOL STUDENTS IN NILGIRIS, INDIA

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### ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** It is critical for children to understand food-related risks to preserve their health and the health of others, particularly because their food preparation responsibilities will increase in adulthood.

**Aim:** This study evaluate the echelon of attitude and behavior towards practices of healthy food habits, physical exercises, mental health as well as social adoptability among the school students/Adolescents in Nilgiris.

**Methods:** A Cross sectional study was conducted among 205 secondary and higher secondary school students/Adolescents of age group 15 to < 18 from various Government schools in Nilgiris district of Tamil Nadu.

**Results:** Totally 205 students were participated in the study, only 47% (96) students told that they used to sleep for more than 7 hours. The most significant alarming fact about the study is that 60 % (123) students like to take fast foods/junk foods. 103 (50%) students revealed that they face troubles occasionally in concentrating while studies without quoting appropriate rationale for this issue.

**Conclusion:** Health education is to positively influence the health behavior of individuals and communities as well as the living and working conditions that influence their health. Health education improves the health status of individuals, families, communities, states, and the nation. Adolescent students must be encouraged by the school administration and family members for upgrading their concentration skills, mental health and gratifying interpersonal associations with others and their potential to adapt comfortably to different social situations in a variety of settings must be explored

**KEYWORDS :** School Children, Knowledge, Practices, health

### INTRODUCTION

Intensifying obesity rates, prominent food insecurity, and the mounting acknowledgment that nourishment is critical to the hale and hearty improvement of adolescent students are all elevating awareness of the need to perk up school health consciousness programs for educating students and parents on the significance of healthy consumption of diets.[1] Our modern lifestyle has forced many to resort to unhealthy food habits. Food-related decisions made by individuals are influenced by a complex array of factors and processes. These include demographic factors, familial and household influences, habit and price, health considerations, ethical concerns and wider societal trends.[2] Previous studies have demonstrated that food safety knowledge among secondary and tertiary students is limited and therefore, warrants attention. Knowledge of food safety should be addressed at an early stage in the educational institutions. This aspect is very important to students since they are also consumers.[3] Food safety education requires basic training in safe food handling practices, preparation, and storage of foods. Graduates from educational institutions are likely to become stakeholders in influential sectors of society, such as the health sector and food industry.[5] Therefore, there is a need to investigate food safety practices, behavior, knowledge, and awareness among secondary and tertiary level students because of their roles in the health of future generations [4]. Lifestyles such as a student's eating habit could affect his or her present health and well-being, as habit established during early childhood can continue into later life [6]. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) report, mental health issues are expected to increase by 15% by 2020 and young people are the group most at risk of experiencing this problem. Mental health issues are often debated and discussed, whether at the national or global. It is essential to give attention to adolescents who experience mental health problems and thus able to eliminate the social stigma of mental illness. At the point, parents and teachers are the individuals identified to perform this heavy duty and their collaboration is vital in promoting positive mental health among the students. According to the 2004 World Health Report of the World Health Organization (WHO), approximately 20% of individuals under the age of 18 years suffer from developmental, emotional or behavioral

problems, and one in eight could be diagnosed with a psychiatric disorder A number of initiatives targeting young persons have been undertaken BY WHO to promote mental health and reduce vulnerability to mental illness [7]. In the other hand social adoptability with positive attitude, conduct and behavior escorts to healthy social life and well being among the community which also ensures achieving milestones of triumph in the society. This familiarization of the adolescents in the society can't be ignored as it plays a vital role in their life ahead.

### AIM

This study evaluate the echelon of attitude and behavior towards practices of healthy food habits, physical exercises, mental health as well as social adoptability among the school students/Adolescents in Nilgiris.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

#### Sampling :

- Type of Study: Cross sectional study
- Sample Type: Administered to Secondary and higher secondary students/Adolescents of age group 15 to < 18 from various Government schools in Nilgiris district of Tamil Nadu. Exclusion criteria- Students from other than secondary and higher secondary schools.
- Sample size : 205 students

#### Study Instrument

- Questionnaire divided into three parts as per the basic definition of Health
- Physical health
- Mental Health
- Social Well being

#### RESULTS:

Totally 205 students were participated in the study of out of which 54.15% (111) were males and 45.85% (97) were females. From the above study it was pertinent that there was lack of good practices to maintain the physical health, whereas the students were more

conscious and superior about mental stamina and social well beings. By thorough introspection of the study it demonstrates that 84% (172) students have a preference of taking tea/coffee and 16% (33) students don't desire so. In the other hand 36% (74) students take carbonated soft drinks; whereas 61% (125) reported that they don't like this. The most significant alarming fact about the study is that 60 % (123) students like to take fast foods/junk foods. Apparently only 47% (96) students have breakfast on a regular basis whereas 24% (49) students found to be very lopsided in taking breakfast and reason so cited was that they can't eat so early in the morning by 20% (41) students and 15% (30) due to lack of time. 46% (94) students affirmed that they consume fruits three times/ week whereas 20% (42) students take fruit regularly. 47% (96) students revealed that they drink less than one liter water daily. Pertaining to personal hygiene 78% (160) students informed that they wash their clothes after wearing once/twice which is a excellent sanitized practice. Only 47% (96) students told that they used to sleep for more than 7 hours. One of the most vital truth which may harm the students that only 12% (26) students do exercise /physical workout more than 3 days in a week whereas 38% (77) don't do keep fit at all and their BMI found to be in higher side which is a cause of concern for all. Correspondingly 54(26%) students prefer playing outdoor games/outdoor activities whereas 92(45%) students spend their leisure time by watching TV. It was found that only 48% (98) were entirely vaccinated against Hepatitis 'B'. Self-medication custom among few students signified their risky behaviours for them as well as their family members. All of these results illustrate that for food safety behaviours, a high level of apparent sternness and a little intensity of professed susceptibility were observed among the adolescent students. 103 (50%) students revealed that they face troubles occasionally in concentrating while studies without quoting appropriate rationale for this issue. 55% (113) students also brought out that they also feel stressed sometimes; whereas 8% (17) students told that they usually feel stressed devoid of apposite explanation being disclosed by them. Most of the student discovered that they have fine intellectual endurance and resilience for facing daily life troubles and concerns. It is an excellent statistics that 48 % (99) students spent quality time with their parents for more than 4 hours; whereas 27% (56) spent 2-4 hours with parents. Credit goes to the parents for proactively knowing the friends circle of their children which was mentioned by 90% (184) students. 19% (38) students told that they don't like to share their problems with anyone. 89% (183) students rated their relations as good with their near and dear ones and friends circle.

Figure 1 Response of Students on Food habits

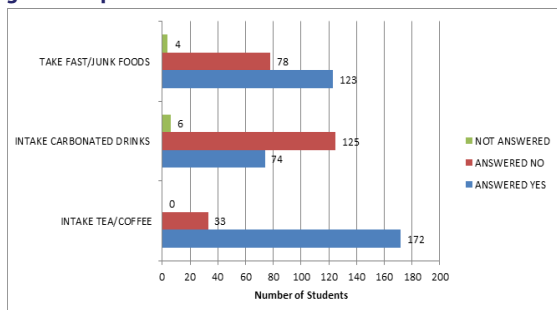


Figure 2 Responses of Students on Mental Health

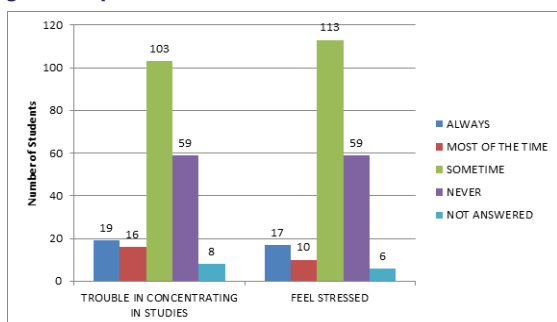
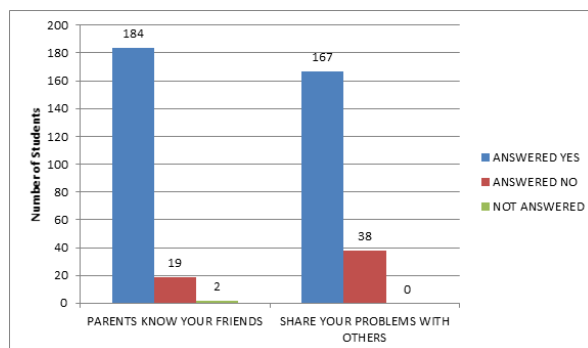


Figure 3 Responses of Students on Social Health



CONCLUSION

Because of the study results, it is apparent that students must be encouraged to refrain from the habit of taking junk foods/fast foods from outside. Lack of adequate exercise can lead to numerous health problems in adolescences. Therefore motivational sessions may be organized at the school level for students to participate in playing outdoor games and regular exercises actively. Skipping breakfast is another cause of concern in adolescents, and hence parents must put their best efforts to prepare the food and make their children ensure having breakfast before going to school. In the similar way few students have revealed having problems in concentration and number of students mentioned that they have stressed often in the life. This problem must be encountered by detecting the base line root cause and eliminating the roots of these issues by organizing the Art of living and motivational sessions for students. Parents must be sensitized to the fact that whose children begin put on show for warning signs of a mental health dilemma, frequently set off hooked on a self denial approach fearing the social disgrace coupled with psychological ill health. The skills, behavior and propensity underpinning the lifestyle of the students can be modified during the period of secondary and higher secondary education as it is moldable in this stage of life. The most vital aim of the student health consciousness survey is to endow with outcome measures that can be used to assess intercessions and to roadway student health in long run.

RECOMMENDATION

Health education and health promotion are two essential aspects of responsibility shouldered by schools. It is highly recommended that different approaches to encourage raising awareness of the need to improve school food programs and to educate students and families on the importance of healthy eating. It should be made very clear that the intake of food must be nutritious rather than junk food. These approaches encompass public policies and environments to foster healthy eating and offering students a choice between two vegetable options potentially leading to the long-term impact of enhanced health outcomes in terms of reduced levels of obesity. This study suggests that diets high in trans and saturated fats should be avoided to eliminate the negative impact on memory, nutritional deficiencies early in life, thereby preventing the male cognitive development of school-aged children, and to ensure the high level of cognition, concentration, and energy levels among adolescents. It will also help to alleviate susceptible to illness, headaches and stomach aches, resulting in school absences. Nutritional deficiencies (particularly zinc, vitamins-B, Omega-3 fatty acids, and protein) must be recognized earlier to prevent mal-cognitive development of adolescents. Students must be advised and encouraged by their parents and teachers to have breakfast regularly which enhances student's psychosocial well-being, reduce aggression and school suspensions, and decrease discipline problems. Suggesting Govt to establish strategies to encourage students to eat healthier food and increase participation in the state nutrition programs by systematic teaching of basic food safety principles. Schools must arrange learning sessions in balance diet which should also include recipe/diet planning; integrating electronic and print media to provide information to students and

parents; to develop ethnic food dishes; and designing pilots for testing of new dishes and gather feedback from students and parents about food fads among adolescents. Having students pay cash for unhealthy items, like desserts and soft drinks, canned foods, preservative foods by restricting prepaid debit cards to healthier foods. Alternatively, it yielded higher sales of healthier food. State government should shoulder responsibilities to guide schools to implement federal policies on educational programmes on nutritious food by adopting strategic approach to encourage students to select healthier options. State Government may include nutrition programs by piloting new healthy dishes for secondary and higher secondary schools. It is highly recommended to conduct detailed studies on mental and social well being to reach in definitive conclusions in larger scale by utilizing the broader sample size with Middle Years Development Instrument (MDI), Perseverance and Engagement scales from the EPOCH Measure of Adolescent Well-Being including the other three scales from the EPOCH – optimism, relationships and happiness.

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