



Enhancing Health and Self Employability of Fisher Women in Kasimedu Fishing Hamlet of Chennai

KEYWORDS

Nora Vigasini

Department of Home Science, Women's Christian College, Chennai

ABSTRACT This community based project focused on enhancing health and livelihood capacity of fisherwomen in Kasimedu, (Royapuram fishing harbour), a prime coastal fishing hamlet in the coast of Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India. Taking into consideration their poor knowledge base, low literacy, skills, capacities and opportunities to maintain, enhance or diversify current livelihood strategies, this project was undertaken to improve the prospect for self-employability through preparation and sale of value added fish products as it is a lucrative business proposal for self-employment especially for fisher women with limited financial resources.

Besides this, the project focused on promoting their knowledge on nutrition, health, hygiene and sanitation which are core factors for attaining all the basic social components necessary for a better standard of living.

Introduction

Fisher women with the basic interest and zeal for development, registered with the 'Sangamam Self help groups', Royapuram, Chennai, which is a Tamil Nadu State Government organization, were chosen to participate in this study. 'Sangamam', is a community activity extension center functioning at Kasi medu, Royapuram, for the upliftment of underprivileged women in this area. The Self Help Groups registered here are very active providing support regarding financial assistance in the form of loans and grants. Thirty seven fisher women between the age group of 25 to 65 years, residing in Kasimedu Fishing Hamlet of Royapuram – a prime coastal fishing region in the east coast of Chennai, participated in this study.

The broad objectives of the project

- Sensitization of the fisher women, belonging to the lower socio economic status, on the importance and means of acquiring good nutrition and sound health.
- Enhancement of self-employability likelihood of fisher women through demonstration on value added fish product preparation.

Some of the main activities and related results

The prime focus of the project was on

- disseminating nutrition education and all-encompassing health education
- demonstration of value added fish products preparation for the fisher women,

thereby laying emphasis on community based service learning.

The post graduate students of the department of Home Science were involved in executing the project.

The project was executed in five phases

Phase I - orientation and training of students involved in the project

Activities:

- Training students in conducting
- Anthropometric assessments

- Clinical assessments and
- Dietary assessments by the project coordinator.
- Training students in imparting nutrition, health and hygiene education
- Assessment of the knowledge of students on nutrition, health, hygiene and sanitation.

Phase II- Evaluation of the nutritional status of the target group & standardization of value added fish recipes.

Activities:

- Evaluation of the nutritional status of the target group (fisher women) by conducting
- Anthropometric Assessments : Height (cm), weight (kg) and Body Mass Index (BMI)
- Clinical assessments for signs of good and poor nutrition
- Dietary assessment using the 24 hour dietary recall method to assess their food consumption pattern
- Assessment of their knowledge on hygiene, sanitation, health and nutrition before the commencement of the project using a pretest questionnaire

Standardization of value added fish recipes

This project was undertaken to demonstrate to the fisher women that there are alternative ways for better utilization of the Indian oil sardine (*Sardinella longiceps*, Mathi meen in Tamil) that comprises a major part of the total fish landings in the east coast, which can fetch them a good income besides selling them as salt cured fish. Therefore this fish was chosen to be incorporated with bone in 17 different standardized recipes.

Phase III- Conduction of nutrition and health education programmes

Activities

DAY	ACTIVITY
1	Imparting hygiene and sanitation education through folk dance and skit
2	Imparting Health and Nutrition education through folk song (Tamil Villu pattu), puppet show, video clips and a poster presentation Preparation and distribution of modules on hygiene, sanitation, health and Nutrition to the participants after the sessions.

Aspects dealt in hygiene and sanitation:

Need and importance of hygiene and sanitation

- Personal hygiene - Emphasis was laid on brushing teeth every morning, bathing everyday using soap, wearing clean clothes, washing hair with shampoo atleast once a week, washing hands with soap after using the toilet, washing hands with soap before preparing and/or eating food, covering the nose and mouth with a hand kerchief when coughing or sneezing, cutting nails every week, personal hygiene to be followed during menstrual cycles etc.,
- Environmental hygiene - Emphasis was laid on potential sources of contamination from the environment and its consequence, need to keep the surroundings clean, proper disposal of waste, role of environmental hygiene in preventing onset of diseases, keeping toilets clean and disinfecting them periodically etc.,
- Occupational hygiene (with specific reference to selling of fresh fish and value added fish products) - Emphasis was laid on avoiding the use of areas where the environment poses a threat to the safety of food, - controlling contaminants and pests in such a way as not to pose a threat to food safety, adopting practices and measures to ensure food is produced under hygienic conditions, disposal of any rejected material in a hygienic manner, responsibilities of food handlers, protecting food and food ingredients from contamination by pests, or by chemical, physical or microbiological contaminants or other objectionable substances during handling, storage and transport etc.,

Methods for achieving hygiene and sanitation in all the three areas

Consequences of lack of sanitation and hygiene

Aspects dealt in health and nutrition:

- Role of different nutrients in human health
- Deficiency and excess of specific nutrients and its consequence
- Special emphasis on role of nutrition in anaemia, osteoporosis, obesity, diabetes, hypertension, heart health, pregnancy
- The basic five food groups and inclusion of all food groups in planning a balanced diet
- Unhealthy vs healthy eating practices
- The food guide pyramid for planning a diet that is adequate in terms of quantity and quality
- Low cost recipes that can be prepared using seasonal foods
- The quantity of different nutrients to be included in the daily diet with special reference to carbohydrate, proteins and fats
- Role of women in deciding the health status of the family

Phase IV - Demonstration on value added fish product preparation**Activities:**

- Preparation of 17 standardized value added fish products recipes using sardines with bones
- Information pertaining to labeling, branding, marketing, financial assistance, initial investment, profit etc., to help the beneficiaries start an enterprise of their own
- Preparation and distribution of a recipe manual
- Demonstration of other nutritious healthy recipes

without fish

A resource person from the Department of Fish Processing Technology, Fisheries College and Research Institute, Tamil Nadu Fisheries University, was invited to address the participants on marketing strategies and financial assistance regarding value added fish products.

Phase V - Evaluation of knowledge on nutrition, health and hygiene after the programme.

The knowledge, attitude and practices of the participants with respect to nutrition, health, hygiene and sanitation was assessed once again in this phase using a post test questionnaire to observe if there was any attitudinal change after the educational programme.

It was observed that there was significant increase in knowledge and attitude score of participants after the intervention.

Challenges in implementing this project

The primary quality expected in a change agent involved in a community outreach program is confidence. In this study, the change agents were students. Before the commencement of the project, some of the students were shy, nervous, lacked confidence and had inhibitions in coming to the forefront to conduct the programme.

This problem was overcome by conducting one day workshops on theatrics and puppetry.

These workshops were organized with an objective to cultivate the confidence of students in being able to express their ideas through dramatics. Several practical strategies such as voice modulation, body language, mime, dialogue delivery, expressions etc., were employed to train the students for using drama and puppetry to reach the community.

Building interest and sustaining the attention of the target group were a challenge. Communicating nutrition, health, hygiene and sanitation information through Tamil Folk dance (Kummi attam), folk song (Villupattu - Bow song), skit and puppetry helped to build and sustain the interest of the participants.

Outcome of the project

The outcome of the project can be viewed from two facets

- Its impact on the students who were involved in executing the project
- Its impact on the fisher women who participated in project

Impact on students

- Enabled students to acquire hands-on experience in conducting nutritional assessments by applying the techniques taught in a class room.
- Inculcated a service oriented spirit in the young minds of students by actively engaging them in planning and organizing activities for every stage of the project.
- Helped students analyze and understand the existing knowledge, attitude and practices on nutrition, health, hygiene and sanitation of the target group, which enabled students to interpret the findings in terms of what measures need to be taken to rectify existing dietary and life style patterns.
- Helped students acquire knowledge and confidence by involving them in scripting the story for the skit

and puppet show, composing the lyrics for the folk dance and folk song, designing the content of posters and planning the content for the modules on Nutrition and health, Hygiene and Sanitation that better equipped them in conducting the programme.

Impact on fisher women

- Sensitization of the fisher women, belonging to the lower socio economic status, on the importance and means of acquiring sound health by adopting of proper sanitary and hygiene practices and good nutrition.
- Enhancement of self-employability likelihood of fisher women through demonstration on value added fish product preparation.
- Helping fisher women realize that they can effectively contribute to the financial needs of their family by preparing and marketing value added fish products in a hygienic way.
- Providing inputs on hygienic preparation, packaging and marketing of value added fish products
- Providing information on organizations to be approached for financial assistance.

Conclusion

Value added fish product development and marketing has the potential to alleviate poverty by providing an opportunity for gainful self-employment for the fisher women folk who aspire to become stronger socially and economically. Hygienically prepared value added fish products with consistent quality have a promising internal and external market. Imbibing and practicing hygienic and sanitary practices would better equip them in successively running a fish product preparation unit of their own. Products that are hygienically prepared have a greater market potential that paves way for growth and expansion of business in future. Accordingly, this project has provided enough inputs to its participants (fisher women) thus paving the way for the promotion of nutritional well-being and health of participants besides providing ideas for alternate income through a different livelihood strategy.