KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES, AND PRACTICES REGARDING BALANCED NUTRITION AND ASSOCIATED FACTORS AMONG SCHOOL TEACHERS IN SELECTED GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS IN PUTHUKKUDIYIRUPPU DIVISION, MULLAITIVU DISTRICT, SRI LANKA

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Abstract

School teachers play an influential role in shaping the dietary behaviours and nutritional awareness of school-age children. Despite , limited evidence exists on the nutritional knowledge, attitudes, and practices of teachers in post-conflict regions of Sri Lanka**.** Puthukkudiyiruppu Division, Mullaitivu District, remains under-researched, where residual effects of prolonged conflict continue to affect health infrastructure. This study described the knowledge, attitudes, and practices regarding balanced nutrition among school teachers in selected government schools in Puthukkudiyiruppu Division, Mullaitivu District, Sri Lanka. Adescriptive cross-sectional study used stratified random sampling of 12 government schools. Sample size (223; Raosoft: population 425, 5% margin of error, 95% confidence, 10% non-response) was exceeded: 310 eligible teachers (employed ≥6 months; excluding extended leave, absence, or non-consent) received self-administered questionnaires; 295 responded (95.2%). The self-developed questionnaire was expert-validated and pre-tested; covered socio-demographics, nutritional knowledge, attitudes, practices, and associated factors. Ethical clearance: Ethics Review Committee, University of Sri Jayewardenepura (Ref: REC/AHS/25056). Knowledge (13 items) was categorised as Excellent (9–13 correct), Good (6–8), or Poor (<6); attitudes and practices used Likert scales. Chi-square tests examined associations between categorical variables and KAP levels ($p<0.05$ significant).According to the findings, most participants were aged 31–40 years (41.4%, N=122), female (58.3%, N=172), single (78.6%, N=232), and diploma-holders (63.7%, N=188). Knowledge was excellent in 95.3% (n = 281), but only 35.5% (n = 105) identified healthy sources of dietary fat and 19.0% (n = 56) knew recommended daily sugar intake. Attitudes were strongly positive (balanced diets: M = 4.77, SD = 0.46). Dietitian or nutritionist consultation (M = 2.44, SD = 1.14) and salt reduction (M = 3.33, SD = 1.25) were the weakest practices. Age was the only socio-demographic factor associated with knowledge ($p = 0.044$). Perceived workload affecting diet was associated with knowledge ($p = 0.008$), attitudes ($p = 0.003$), and practices ($p = 0.002$), with small effects (V = 0.13–0.18). Social media was the main information source (71.5%, n = 211); its users had high knowledge (98.1% excellent) but the lowest excellent attitudes (52.6%; $p = 0.001$).Teachers showed strong knowledge and attitudes, but knowledge gaps and practice deficits remain. Social media is accessible but risks misinformation; causality cannot be inferred. Workload management, targeted nutrition education, and evidence-based nutrition information through health professionals and schools are recommended.

Keywords: Balanced nutrition, Knowledge, Attitudes, Practices, School teachers, Sri Lanka