NUTRITIONAL KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDE, BEHAVIOURS AND ANTHROPOMETRIC DATA AMONG ADOLESCENT FEMALE SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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2013

Background: Adolescence is the period of life which is often characterized by unhealthy nutritional behaviours including irregular consumption of meals, excessive snacking, eating away from home and meal skipping. While many factors have been found to influence these behaviours, most notable of these are nutrition knowledge and attitudes towards nutrition. Previous research has indicated a significant relationship between nutritional knowledge, attitude and behaviours among adolescents, particularly females. However, little is known about the relationship among these variables amid female secondary school students, particularly those of St. Joseph's Covent, San Fernando.

Objective: To determine the association between nutritional knowledge, attitudes, behaviours and Body Mass Index (BMI) among the students of St. Joseph's Convent (SJC), San Fernando.

Design: In this cross-sectional study, 218 students from all the form classes of St. Joseph's Convent, San Fernando were investigated. This sample was acquired by means of non-probability sampling. A structured questionnaire divided into four (4) sections was the sole method for data collection over a three-week period. BMI was calculated from self-reported weight and height measures. Questionnaires with attached parental consent forms were given to students to complete at home and return to their respective form dean the following day. One-way ANOVA and Post Hoc tests, Simple Linear Regression, Pearson's Correlation and Spearman's Rho Correlation were used to analyse all collected data.

Results: The majority and minority of students were from Form Six (28.4%) and Form Four (10.1%) respectively. The mean BMI of the study population was 20.88 ± 5.100. BMI for Form One students was statistically lower ($p = 0.012$) than Form Twos. The mean nutritional knowledge score was 13.74 ± 1.296 out of 15. Nutritional knowledge level was not the same

across form classes and was statistically higher (p = 0.009) among Form Sixes than Form Twos. Ninety-six point nine percent (96.9%) of the students had ‘good’ nutritional knowledge. The mean attitude score was 2.31 ± 4.659 out of 14. Form Ones and Form Sixes had the highest and lowest mean attitude score respectively. Attitude towards nutrition differed across the form classes, with Form Sixes having a statistically lower (p = 0.006) attitude score (or more negative attitude) than Form Ones. Most of the students (67.0%) had a negative attitude towards nutrition. The mean behaviour score was 34.86 ± 5.246 out of 72. The highest and lowest scores attained were 49 (1.0%) and 21 (1.0%) respectively. Form Fours and Form Sixes had the highest (36.14 ± 5.285) and lowest (33.07 ± 4.682) behaviour scores respectively. No statistically significant difference (p > 0.05) in behaviour score among the form classes was found, indicating that nutritional behaviours were the same across form classes. Most of the students (88.5%) had ‘average’ nutritional behaviours. Both nutritional knowledge and attitude towards nutrition were associated with nutritional behaviours. Three nutritional behaviours were associated with increased BMI.

Conclusion: Nutritional knowledge and attitude towards nutrition were different across all forms classes while nutritional behaviours were not. An association between nutritional knowledge and behaviours and between attitude towards nutrition and nutritional behaviours exist among this study population. Three nutritional behaviours were associated with an increasing BMI.