

ASSESSMENT OF NUTRITIONAL STATUS AND NUTRITIONAL KNOWLEDGE IN FEMALE UNDERGRADUATES RESIDING IN HOSTELS OF UNIVERSITY OF SRI JAYEWARDENEPURA, SRI LANKA

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The significance of improving nutritional knowledge in order to establish a positive influence on health should not be underestimated. This study assessed nutritional status and nutritional knowledge among female undergraduates residing in hostels of University of Sri Jayewardenepura. The study population of this descriptive cross sectional study consisted of 662 female undergraduates in their first and fourth years of study. A self-administered questionnaire was administered to determine nutritional knowledge. Anthropometric measurements including weight and height were measured using standard methodologies. The percentage of scores given for knowledge assessing questions were categorized in to two, ≥ 50 marks and < 50 marks, having good and poor knowledge respectively. Results revealed that students gained nutritional facts through friends (53.8%), media (68.9%), parents (79.2%) and university lectures (15.3%) and most of them developed knowledge through several sources mentioned above. Fifty nine percent performed poorly while 41% had good knowledge in the nutritional knowledge assessment rating. Other study recorded less percentage (28%) of poor overall nutritional knowledge. Nutritional knowledge significantly related with faculty ($p < 0.05$). Students from faculty of Medical Sciences had a noticeably higher knowledge (88.7%) on nutrition when compared to counterparts from other three faculties (44%, 38%, 34% had good knowledge in faculties of Applied Sciences, Humanities and Social Sciences and Management Studies respectively). Furthermore, the prevalence of underweight, normal weight, overweight and obese were 41.1%, 47.6%, 6% and 5.3% respectively according to Asian cut-off values. Distribution of BMI categories according to the faculties revealed that the highest prevalence of underweight students (50.9%) was from Faculty of Medical Sciences in contrast with their high nutritional knowledge. Overall, the students were deficient in knowledge and understanding of the facts about energy and nutritive values of foods. Thus adequate nutritional education is needed at a university level from first to final years of study to enlighten their behaviour on health food choices, dietary patterns and life styles thereby ensuring better nutritional status.

Keywords: Nutritional Knowledge, Nutritional Status