Sri Lanka Medical Association

130th Anniversary International Medical Congress

13th-16th July 2017
Hotel Galadari, Colombo, Sri Lanka

Special Supplement of the Ceylon Medical Journal
Volume 62, Supplement 1, July 2017
Sri Lanka Medical Association

130th Anniversary International Medical Congress

Abstracts

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Barriers for healthy eating among adolescents in Galle as perceived by school teachers

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Introduction & Objectives:
The pattern of diseases in Sri Lanka has changed from endemic deficiencies to NCDs. Within the past few decades with rapid urbanization, food habits too have changed in the country. School teachers have close contact with children next to parents. The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of school teachers on barriers for healthy eating among female adolescents in Galle, Sri Lanka.

Methods:
A descriptive qualitative design was used. Four focus group discussions were carried out with school teachers (n=22) in the Galle educational zone. Data were analysed by qualitative content analysis.

Results:
Categories identified were; poor availability of healthy food, low socio economic status of parents, deficiency in provision of knowledge about food and nutrition; and individual food preferences. Poor availability of healthy food, extensive exposure to fast food, increased snacking behaviour, were emphasized by the teachers. A decline in the quality of food with the use of agro-chemicals was highlighted. Teachers’ perceived parental employment and low socioeconomic status remarkably influenced an adolescent’s food habits. Deficiency in the school curriculum such as lack of emphasis on food and nutrition aspects for adolescents was perceived as another barrier to healthy eating. Identified individual food preferences were taste, convenience, cost, appearance and the time available to eat.

Conclusion:
Findings of the study indicate interesting perspectives of teachers on adolescents’ healthy eating. These factors need to be considered in health policy planning and in educational reform to decrease prevalence of NCD in the country.