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**Perceived stress, dietary intake habits, and dietary self-efficacy among nursing students: A cross-sectional study**

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**Background:** Nursing students are at high risk for developing stress, and stress is associated with dietary habits, and dietary self-efficacy. The impact of dietary habits and dietary self-efficacy on perceived stress has been poorly examined in Sri Lanka.

**Objective:** To assess the association between dietary intake habits, and dietary self-efficacy with perceived stress among nursing students.

**Method:** A cross-sectional survey was conducted with a convenience sample (n=340) of the second and third-year nursing students in the School of Nursing, Galle, Sri Lanka. The questionnaire included demographic details, Perceived Stress Scale 10 (PSS-10), Dietary Self-Efficacy Scale (DIET-SE) and questions related to dietary intake habits. Descriptive statistics, Spearman’s correlation, and Kruskal-Wallis H test were used for the data analysis.

**Results:** The majority of the participants were females (n=311, 91.5%). The mean±SD scores of the PSS-10 and the DIET-SE were 20.1±5.3 (range 6-36) and 20.8±6.9 (range 4-44). Approximately 10% of the participants showed a higher stress level (score≤13), and 80 % showed a moderate stress level (score 14-26). From the sample, 66.5 % consumed cooked vegetables daily, while 23.5% consumed raw vegetables, and 27.6 % consumed fruits. Less than 25% of participants consumed fast foods (24.1 %), and sugary soft-drinks (17.6 %) daily. Unhealthy dietary intakes and dietary self-efficacy in negative emotions were negatively associated with perceived stress ( $r_s=-0.24$ ,  $p<0.05$  and  $r_s=-0.11$ ,  $p<0.05$ , respectively). A significant difference in healthy food intake was observed across different living places ( $H=19.9$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) (mean ranks: the highest for home=194.9, the lowest for hostels=149.8).

**Conclusion:** Perceived stress is a significant issue among nursing students. Findings indicate the importance of mental well-being and consuming nutritious food for a healthy life. Moreover, it is important to explore the reasons for the poor intake of healthy food among nursing students living in hostels.