



Insights Into Youth Nutritional Awareness And Dietary Patterns: Implications For Sustainable Social Health Strategies

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the levels of nutritional awareness and dietary patterns among youths aged 17 to 30 and explores their implications for sustainable social health promotion. Through survey method involving 86 participants, with a self-developed questionnaire, the study assesses various dimensions of nutritional awareness and dietary habits. Findings reveal a spectrum of awareness levels among youths, with a significant proportion demonstrating limited understanding of nutritional concepts. While some youths exhibit desirable dietary patterns, a substantial portion engages inconsistently or inadequately in healthy dietary practices. Additionally, lifestyle-related health issues such as obesity, hyperlipidemia, and digestive disorders emerge as prevalent concerns. However, gender does not significantly influence nutritional awareness or dietary patterns. Importantly, a positive correlation is observed between higher levels of nutritional awareness, healthier dietary habits, and sustainable social health outcomes among youths. These findings underscore the importance of targeted interventions and comprehensive education programs to promote healthier lifestyles and mitigate the burden of lifestyle-related health issues among youths, thereby fostering sustainable social health.

Key Words: Nutritional Awareness, Dietary Patterns, Sustainable Social Health, Youth

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the focus of public health practice has broadened significantly, driven by the imperative to promote sustainable health and nutrition. Consequently, research into eating habits and the nutritional content of foods has become increasingly vital for nutritional counselling professionals worldwide. Adequate nutrition is a cornerstone of a healthy lifestyle, necessitating heightened awareness of the nutrients present in foods and their roles in bodily functions, growth, disease prevention, and overall well-being. Optimal nutrition supports cardiovascular health, muscular strength, respiratory function, immune response, wound healing, and psychological health. By consuming a balanced diet comprising carbohydrates, proteins, fats, vitamins, minerals, and water, individuals can mitigate the risk of nutrition-related diseases and ensure optimal bodily functions.

Food is an indispensable aspect of human existence, providing sustenance necessary for survival. However, in contemporary society, many individuals consume food without considering its nutritional value, driven by factors such as cultural influences, lifestyle choices, climate, and dietary habits. This lack of nutritional awareness is compounded by modern living environments, where individuals prioritize their busy schedules over their health. Nutrition encompasses not only the quantity and quality of food consumed but also how the body processes and utilizes nutrients for growth, maintenance, and renewal. It is an investment in physical fitness and illness prevention. A balanced diet, comprising carbohydrates, proteins, fats, vitamins, minerals, and water, is essential for supporting bodily functions and preventing deficiency diseases. Ultimately, adopting healthier dietary habits and lifestyles is paramount for improving overall health outcomes and mitigating the adverse effects of modern living.

Essential Dietary Patterns for Optimal Health

A balanced and nutritious diet is fundamental for maintaining good health and preventing various diseases. A diet rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins, and healthy fats provides essential nutrients necessary for the body's growth, repair, and optimal function. Incorporating a variety of foods from each food group ensures a diverse intake of vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, and dietary fiber, supporting overall well-being. Additionally, staying hydrated by drinking an adequate amount of water throughout the day is crucial for maintaining proper bodily functions. Limiting the intake of processed foods, sugary beverages, and foods high in saturated and trans fats helps reduce the risk of obesity, heart disease, diabetes, and other chronic conditions. Adopting healthy eating habits, such as eating regular meals, practicing portion control, and mindful eating, promotes better digestion, energy levels, and mood stability. Overall, prioritizing a balanced and nutritious diet lays the foundation for sustained health and vitality throughout life.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Nutrition, as the science of food and its utilization by the body, is pivotal for human health and well-being. In the context of modern lifestyles, characterized by increased consumption of fast foods and sedentary habits, understanding the impact of dietary choices on health becomes paramount. Unhealthy behaviors prevalent among youths, such as irregular eating patterns and reliance on processed foods, pose significant risks for nutritional deficiencies and chronic diseases. Recognizing the pivotal role of adolescence in shaping lifelong eating habits, this study aims to investigate the nutritional awareness of youths and the factors influencing their food choices. By shedding light on these dynamics, the research seeks to inform interventions aimed at promoting healthy eating behaviors among youths, thereby fostering sustainable social health and mitigating long-term health implications. This study not only addresses the immediate nutritional needs of adolescents but also holds implications for their future well-being, underscoring the importance of nutritional education and parental involvement in shaping healthier dietary patterns for generations to come.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

In the contemporary context of evolving dietary preferences and lifestyle habits among youths, there is a pressing need to investigate the level of nutritional awareness and the prevailing dietary patterns among this demographic group. The proliferation of fast food consumption, irregular eating habits, and inadequate nutritional education pose significant challenges to the promotion of sustainable social health. Understanding the factors influencing youths' food choices and their implications for long-term health outcomes is essential for devising effective interventions aimed at fostering healthier dietary behaviors and mitigating the risk of malnutrition, chronic diseases, and societal health disparities. Therefore, this study aims to explore the relationship between nutritional awareness, dietary patterns, and sustainable social health among youths, thus contributing to the development of targeted strategies for promoting optimal nutrition and well-being in this population segment. On the basis of their lifestyle, the present empirical investigation has been entitled as, **“Insights into Youth Nutritional Awareness and Dietary Patterns: Implications for Sustainable Social Health Strategies”**.

OBJECTIVES

1. To assess the level of nutritional awareness among youths.
2. To compare the level of nutritional awareness among youths based on Gender
3. To examine the dietary patterns prevalent among youths.
4. To compare the dietary patterns prevalent among youths based on Gender
5. To study lifestyle-related health issues faced by youths.
6. To investigate the potential relationship between nutritional awareness, dietary patterns, and sustainable social health outcomes among youths.

HYPOTHESES

1. There is no significant difference in the level of nutritional awareness among youths.
2. There is no significant association between dietary patterns and demographic factors among youths.
3. There is no significant relationship between unhealthy dietary habits and lifestyle-related health issues among youths.
4. There is no significant relationship between nutritional awareness, dietary patterns, and sustainable social health outcomes among youths.

METHODOLOGY AND ANALYSIS IN BRIEF

SAMPLE

A sample of 86 youths between 17 to 30 ages were randomly selected for the present study from Thiruvananthapuram District of Kerala.

METHOD

Survey method was adopted for the study. The age range of 17-30 years was selected for data collection to assess the level of nutritional awareness among young adults and its impact on fostering sustainable social health.

TOOL

An Inventory on Nutritional Awareness and Dietary Patterns among Youths which was developed by the Investigators was used as a tool for conducting the survey. The Inventory totally contains 80 items of 4 dimensions such as (1) Dimension 1- Nutrition literacy (20 Items)), (2) Dimension 2- Food habits and Dietary Pattern (20 Items), (3) Dimension 3- Life style related Health Issues (20 Items), and Dimension 4- Knowledge on Healthy Food (20 Items). Respondents were required to choose one of the five alternatives, namely 'Always,' 'Often,' 'Sometimes,' 'Rarely,' and 'Never.' Weights of 5, 4, 3, 2, and 1 were assigned to these alternatives. Scores were reversed for responses of unfavourable items. A high score indicates a heightened level of Nutritional awareness.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Various studies (Muzafar Ahmad, 2018), Amina Mehrin Bano et al, (2016), G. Amrutha, Archita Singh, (2019), Mukul Sinha, (2020) conducted in different regions of India shed light on the dietary habits, nutritional awareness, and health status of adolescents. (Sithara Balan, 2016)'s study in Thiruvananthapuram city revealed a prevalence of underweight among adolescents, urging attention to their health. Similarly, Amina Mehrin Bano's study in Chennai highlighted low awareness of nutrition essentials among adolescents, with a significant portion skipping meals and lacking awareness about vital nutrients. Muzafar Ahmad's research in Jammu and Kashmir emphasized the need for improved nutrition awareness among college students. Additionally, studies by Shantanu Sharma, Ritu Priya, and others underscored the importance of nutritional knowledge, attitude, and self-efficacy in shaping dietary behaviors and overall health outcomes among adolescents. These studies collectively advocate for comprehensive interventions, including education programs and policy measures, to address nutritional deficiencies and promote better health among school-going adolescents across India.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF THE COLLECTED DATA

Objective1: To assess the level of nutritional awareness among youths.

Table-1: Level of nutritional awareness among youths

| Score Range | Extent of nutritional awareness among youths | No. | Percentage |
|--------------|--|-----------|------------|
| 301-400 | Very much Aware | 6 | 6.97 |
| 201-300 | Aware | 18 | 20.93 |
| 101-200 | Moderately Aware | 17 | 19.76 |
| 91-100 | Hardly Aware | 31 | 36.04 |
| 80- 90 | Not Aware | 14 | 16.27 |
| Total | | 86 | 100 |

Table 1 outlines the distribution of nutritional awareness scores among youths, categorizing them into different levels based on their scores. A small percentage of youths (6.97%) fall into the "Very much Aware" category, indicating a high level of nutritional understanding. However, the majority of youths are classified as "Aware" (20.93%) or "Moderately Aware" (19.76%), suggesting varying degrees of knowledge about nutrition. A significant proportion of youths (36.04%) are categorized as "Hardly Aware," indicating a limited understanding of nutritional concepts. Furthermore, 16.27% of youths are classified as "Not Aware," highlighting a critical need for educational interventions to improve nutritional awareness among this group.

Objective 2: To compare the level of nutritional awareness among youths based on Gender.

Table: 2: Mean, S.D. and t-value of mean score of nutritional awareness of Male & Female youths

| Gender | N | Mean | SD | df | t-value |
|--------|----|------|-----|----|---------|
| Male | 42 | 104 | 1.9 | 84 | 1.651 |
| Female | 44 | 103 | 1.3 | | |

From the table-2, it is evident that the calculated t-value is 1.651 which is less than the table value 1.990 at 0.05 level of significance with the df = 84 and which is also less than the table value 2.639 at 0.01 level of significance with df = 84 and therefore it is not significant at both levels. Hence the null hypothesis is accepted. This indicates that there is no significant difference between the level of nutritional awareness among youths based on Gender.

Objective 3: To examine the dietary patterns prevalent among youths.**Table 3: Responses of participant youths regarding their dietary patterns.**

| Food habits and Dietary patterns- Responses of participant youths | Responses in Percentage | | | | |
|---|-------------------------|-------|-----------|--------|-------|
| | Always | Often | Sometimes | Rarely | Never |
| | 38.80 | 5.80 | 5.71 | 8.09 | 36.80 |

From table 3, it is clear that a significant portion (38.80%) of the respondents claim to always have desirable Food habits and Dietary patterns. However, the data also indicates a considerable percentage of students who rarely (8.09%) or never (36.80%) have the preferable adequate Food habits and Dietary patterns. This suggests that a substantial portion of the participant youth may not consistently engage with or possess adequate Food habits and Dietary patterns. The above responses indicate that almost all the participants for the study did not have adequate Food habits and Dietary patterns. The relatively low percentages for "Often" (5.80%) and "Sometimes" (5.71%) imply that a significant portion of the respondents does not frequently engage in activities or practices that contribute to healthy Food habits and Dietary patterns. There is room for improvement in promoting more consistent efforts among youths to enhance their knowledge of healthy Food habits and Dietary patterns.

Objective 4: To compare the dietary patterns prevalent among youths based on Gender.**Table: 4: Mean, S.D. and t-value of mean score of the Dimension Food habits and Dietary patterns of Male & Female youths**

| Gender | N | Mean | SD | df | t-value |
|--------|----|------|-----|----|---------|
| Male | 42 | 48 | 1.1 | 84 | 1.304 |
| Female | 44 | 43 | 0.3 | | |

From the table-4, it is evident that the calculated t-value is 1.304 which is less than the table value 1.990 at 0.05 level of significance with the df = 84 and which is also less than the table value 2.639 at 0.01 level of significance with df = 84 and therefore it is not significant at both levels. Hence the null hypothesis is accepted. This indicates that there is no significant difference between the dietary patterns prevalent among youths based on Gender.

Objective 5: To study lifestyle-related health issues faced by youths.**Table: 5: Percentage of participant youths facing the Lifestyle-related selected health issues**

| Sr.No. | Lifestyle-related selected health issues | Percentage of participant youths facing health issues |
|--------|---|---|
| 1. | Obesity | 57 |
| 2. | Type 2 Diabetes | 6 |
| 3. | Cardiovascular Disease | 2 |
| 4. | Hypertension (High Blood Pressure) | 14 |
| 5. | Hyperlipidemia (High Cholesterol) | 23 |
| 6. | Osteoporosis | 15 |
| 7. | Gout | 13 |
| 8. | Non-Alcoholic Fatty Liver Disease (NAFLD) | 4 |
| 9. | Digestive Disorders | 25 |
| 10. | Cancer | 1 |

Table 5 presents the percentage of participant youths facing various lifestyle-related health issues. Among the surveyed youths, obesity appears to be the most prevalent issue, with 57% of participants affected, indicating a concerning trend in unhealthy weight management. Following this, hyperlipidemia (high cholesterol) and digestive disorders emerge as significant concerns, affecting 23% and 25% of youths respectively, highlighting potential dietary imbalances and digestive health issues within this demographic. Hypertension (high blood pressure) and osteoporosis also show noteworthy prevalence rates at 14% and 15% respectively, underscoring the importance of lifestyle modifications to address these conditions. Conversely, conditions like type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, gout, non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD), and cancer appear to have lower prevalence rates among the surveyed youths, though attention is still warranted to prevent their potential escalation. Overall, the data underscores the critical need for targeted interventions and educational initiatives aimed at promoting healthier lifestyle choices and dietary habits among youths to mitigate the burden of lifestyle-related health issues in this demographic.

Objective 6: To investigate the potential relationship between nutritional awareness, dietary patterns, and sustainable social health outcomes among youths.

Table 6 Coefficient of Correlation between nutritional awareness, dietary patterns, and sustainable social health outcomes among the participant youths

| Variables | N | df | Table value | 'r' | Calculated 'r' value | Remarks |
|--|----|----|-------------|-----|----------------------|---------------------------|
| Nutritional Awareness and Dietary Patterns | 86 | 84 | 0.1149 | | 0.675 | Significant at 0.01 level |
| Nutritional Awareness and Sustainable Social Health Outcomes | 86 | 84 | 0.1149 | | 0.753 | Significant at 0.01 level |
| Dietary Patterns and Sustainable Social Health Outcomes | 86 | 84 | 0.0813 | | 0.843 | Significant at 0.01 level |

Based on the information presented in Table 6, it can be deduced that the calculated 'r' values (0.675, 0.753, 0.843) exceed the critical 'r' value at the 0.01 level of significance. Therefore, the corresponding null hypothesis is rejected. Thus, the result shows that there is significant positive correlation between nutritional awareness, dietary patterns, and sustainable social health outcomes among the participant youths in the total sample.

FINDINGS

- A majority of youths demonstrate varying levels of nutritional awareness.
- A small percentage (6.97%) exhibit a high level of awareness, while a significant portion (36.04%) shows limited understanding.
- There's a critical need for educational interventions to improve awareness, especially among those categorized as "Hardly Aware" (36.04%) and "Not Aware" (16.27%).
- No significant difference in nutritional awareness levels was found between male and female youths.
- A significant portion of youths (38.80%) claim to always have desirable dietary patterns, but a considerable percentage rarely (8.09%) or never (36.80%) exhibit preferable habits.

The findings suggest a need for improvement in promoting consistent efforts among youths to enhance their knowledge and practice of healthy dietary patterns.

- There was no significant difference in dietary patterns prevalent among male and female youths.
- Obesity emerges as the most prevalent issue among surveyed youths, affecting 57% of participants.
- Other significant concerns include hyperlipidemia (23%), digestive disorders (25%), hypertension (14%), and osteoporosis (15%).
- Lower prevalence rates were observed for conditions like type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, gout, non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD), and cancer.
- There is a significant positive correlation between nutritional awareness, dietary patterns, and sustainable social health outcomes among youths.

This suggests that higher levels of nutritional awareness and healthier dietary patterns are associated with better social health outcomes among youths.

EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

The present study has found very important in our society. Targeted interventions and educational initiatives are essential to promote healthier lifestyle choices and dietary habits among youths. Study suggests that comprehensive programs addressing nutritional awareness, dietary education, and lifestyle modifications are warranted to mitigate the burden of lifestyle-related health issues and foster sustainable social health outcomes in this demographic. The foundations for the accurate knowledge and attitude towards health should be laid in childhood. Conducting health education workshops or including more information about food-nutrient and food-health association in the school curriculum would be an effective measure to bring about healthy attitudes. Interventions that aim to increase opportunities at school and colleges to practice healthy eating and physical activity may be effective, especially in promoting and supporting healthy behavioural changes among students. Practice yoga and meditation in schools and colleges for adopting good lifestyle. The curriculum of the adolescents should clearly focus on the healthy eating habits and lifestyles, and this should be given to them at the very early stages of development, right from the school going period. This current study aims at implementing health education in the curriculum in schools on future. This study is much more relevant in making the policies related to health in our society.

CONCLUSION

Nutrition plays an important role in raising awareness and ultimately health of society. It has been shown to play an important role in influencing healthy food habits which ensure nutrient needs throughout lifecycle are met adequately since individual needs are determined by rate of growth. Nutrition status of an individual is a result of interrelated factors influenced by quality and quantity of food consumed and the physical health. As per the responses in survey conducted, students have awareness about some nutrients to certain extent. The students are concerned about their health to some extent, but they do not make effort to care of themselves because of some or the other reasons. It is imperative to help develop the right attitude towards diet and nutrition. Therefore, steps should be taken to increase the level of awareness about proper nutrition among the young adults for their general well-being and also to increase the overall productivity in the society.

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