

Assessment of the Association between Selected Socio-demographic Characteristics with Food Safety Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices of School Children in Colombo, Sri Lanka

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Having felicitous knowledge and positive attitude on food safety with proper execution of safe food handling practices since childhood make school children more confident in facing food safety risks as adults in future. This work was conducted to assess and analyse the relationship between some selected socio-demographic factors on the food safety knowledge, attitude and practices among school children in Colombo Education Zone, Sri Lanka. Data were collected using a self-administered questionnaire which contained 44 close ended questions on four basic areas; students' experiences with food preparation, students' attitude on food safety, students' food safety knowledge and their self-reported practices. Three hundred and eighty volunteer students (14-16 years old) from government schools of Colombo Education Zone were participated in the study. Three Scores were given to evaluate food safety knowledge, attitude and practices of students separately. The mean food safety knowledge, attitude and practice scores of students were 59.94 ± 0.83 , 84.33 ± 0.44 , 79.59 ± 0.61 respectively. Mann-Whitney u test indicated gender wise significant differences in food safety knowledge score ($p = 0.035$) and food safety practice score (0.000). Positive correlations were found ($p < 0.05$) between food safety knowledge score and parents' education background, student's academic ranking, Science marks. Significant positive correlations were shown between food safety practice score and student's academic ranking, Science marks. Similarly positive correlation-coefficients were recorded between food safety attitude score and parents' education background and students' Science marks. Results from the regression model indicated that food safety knowledge score significantly decreased if education level of parents, academic rank and Science marks of students ($p < 0.05$) are decreased. Although food safety knowledge score of males is higher than females, poor food safety practices were common among males and students with lower Science marks ($p < 0.05$). In conclusion, gender, parents' education background, students' academic ranking and Science marks can be effectively used as parameters to further improve food safety knowledge, attitude and practices among school children.

Keywords: Food safety; Knowledge; Practices; Attitude; Socio-demographic factors; School children