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Association between Attitudes on Food Advertisements, Eating Behaviour and BMI among Adolescent Boys in a Selected School in Colombo

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Background: Obesity is a common problem in childhood and adolescence. Eating behaviour is an important determinant of obesity. Therefore, it was hypothesized that there should be an association between attitudes towards food advertisements, eating behaviour and Body Mass Index (BMI).

Objectives: To determine attitudes towards food and beverage advertisements, eating behaviour and their association with BMI among adolescent school boys in Colombo.

Methods: A school based cross-sectional study was conducted on adolescent boys (15-16 years, n=120) from a selected boys' school in Colombo district using cluster sampling method. Self-administered 'Adolescent Food Habit Checklist' and 5-point Likert scale (developed by the researchers) were used to assess data on eating behaviour and attitudes towards food and beverage advertisements respectively. The BMI was calculated to assess the nutritional status. Bivariate Pearson correlation coefficient test was used to determine the associations.

Results: From the participants 59% were from urban areas and 64.2% had a monthly income more than 50000 LKR. Regarding the BMI 64.2% had a normal BMI. The underweight, overweight and obese percentage was 20.0%, 11.7% and 4.2%, respectively. Majority of the participants (85.6%) had a good consumption of fruit and vegetables but also had a high consumption of fried food (75.6%). Attitudes regarding advertisements were largely influenced by the appearance of professionals such as doctors or nutritionists and use of comic visuals and catchy melodies. There was a negative correlation between attitudes and eating behaviour ($r=-0.341$, $p=0.020$) and there was no statistically significant association between eating behaviour and BMI ($r=0.044$, $p=0.768$).

Conclusions: Unfavorable attitudes toward advertisements regarding food and beverages had a moderate degree correlation with the unhealthy eating behaviours. Therefore, it is necessary to regulate the advertisements regarding food and beverages while applying measures to authenticate the information given in the advertisements. However, there was no statistically significant correlation between eating behavior and BMI.

Keywords: Adolescent, Advertisements, BMI, Eating behaviour