

Evaluation of Food Safety Knowledge and Perceptions of School Children in Colombo, Sri Lanka: Implications for Food Safety Education

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Thorough knowledge on food safety among school children can make them more confident when facing food safety related risks. The present study focuses on evaluating food safety knowledge and perception of school children, identifying gaps in knowledge on food safety related aspects and recognizing key parties that should take responsibility in their food safety education. A cross sectional study was carried out using 14-16 years old students (n =380) in selected schools in Colombo Education Zone using a self-administered questionnaire. Descriptive statistics, Pearson-correlation, Mann-Whitney U test and Kruskal-Wallis test were performed at 0.05 level of significance. Food safety knowledge and perception of students were evaluated separately. The mean food safety knowledge score of students was 59.94 ± 0.83 where male students showing higher median score than female students. The mean food safety perception score was 84.33 ± 0.44 with no significant difference between male and female cohorts. The food safety perception score increased with the food safety knowledge score of the students. Lack of knowledge on the importance of proper temperature control on microbial safety of foods (41.2%) was evident. Parents, teachers and doctors were identified as the three major parties disseminating food safety education to students. Vast majority of students (92.4%) believed that their food safety knowledge could be further improved through proper education. In conclusion, this study indicates that school children of 14-16 year age category has an average knowledge on food safety and excellent positive food safety attitude. However, their knowledge needs to be enhanced on importance of correct temperature control during food processing and storage. Finally, the strong willingness of students to learn more on food safety leaves a positive insight on future educational attempts.

Keywords: Food safety, Knowledge, School children, Education, Perceptions