

Awareness of women about causes and complications of obesity in Keppitiwalana Grama Niladhari Division

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The rates of being overweight and obese are rising to epidemic proportions, especially among women. Health risks associated with obesity are hypertension, high cholesterol, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, respiratory problems, musculoskeletal diseases and cancers. This study was designed to find out about the women's awareness about causes and complications of obesity.

A quantitative cross sectional descriptive study was conducted in Keppitiwalana Grama Niladhari division, in Kurunegala district. One woman from each house in the age group of 18 years and above was randomly selected from all 152 houses in that division. A questionnaire was administered to assess the level of awareness. Height and weight were measured and Body Mass Index (BMI) was calculated to assess the nutritional states of women, to categorize them as thin, normal weight, overweight and obese. The collected data was entered and analyzed using Microsoft Excel 2007 and Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), version 16.0. Chi-squared (χ^2) test at $P \leq 0.05$ was used to determine the association.

Out of 152 subjects, 36.8% were overweight and obese. Age, education, occupation and standard of living were associated with the level of knowledge. Women aged 60 years and above had a poor level of awareness compared with others. The prevalence of poor level of awareness was higher in persons with elementary education, low standard of living and skilled labors. According to the BMI value, the subjects who are overweight and obese had better awareness than subjects with normal weight. Considering self-perception regarding their body weight, 44.6% of overweight & obese women did not consider them as being overweight or obese.

In conclusion, a considerable proportion of subjects is not aware of the complications and causes of being overweight and do not recognize being overweight as a matter of concern. Also, the subjects with the lowest level of knowledge about the complications of being overweight were elderly females, women with elementary education, skilled laborers and those with low standard of living. A substantial group does not relate being overweight to the diet, lack of exercise or to other major causes of obesity. And the prevalence of misperception as not being overweight was higher among the women with moderate levels of being overweight.