

Impact of nutritional knowledge on dietary behaviors of students in Kuwait University

Yuanlong Pan

Increasing nutritional knowledge is an important component of broader societal efforts to address the high prevalence of nutrition-related diseases. In Kuwait University students are a critical target group since many of their lifestyle behaviors are shaped during college and may continue throughout their life. The aim of this study was to explore the effects of nutritional knowledge on the dietary behavior of 700 undergraduate students of Kuwait University. Nutritional knowledge and dietary behavior of Kuwait University undergraduate students were evaluated using paper-based questionnaires to assess lifestyle and nutrition behavioral changes. Moreover, students who have children have been evaluated to determine whether they tend to affect their kids eating habits positively. A total sample of 700 female and male students was recruited for the study. Students who practiced better dietary habits had better nutritional knowledge. However, the strength of the association was considered weak ($r=0.229$). Similarly, a very weak positive relationship was investigated between parents' nutritional knowledge and children's eating habits ($r=0.070$). The findings suggest that nutritional knowledge can slightly assist in adopting healthier eating habits, which may reduce nutrition-related diseases. However, future studies should emphasize on exploring other factors affecting dietary behavior such as taste, availability, food cost or security, cultural or religious beliefs and perceptions about food and health.

Poor health behaviour has previously been observed among the Kuwaiti population as a result of rapid modernization which has led to a nutrition transition. This puts the population at significant risk of developing overweight and obesity. According to the 2018 Kuwait Nutrition Surveillance System, there is an alarmingly high prevalence of being overweight and obese among the Kuwaiti population. It was estimated that 79.8% of Kuwaiti adults were either overweight (36.0%) or obese (43.8%), whereas the prevalence of being overweight and obese amongst Kuwaiti children aged >5 years to 19 years was 21.5% and 27.5%, respectively. Obesity rates not only affect individuals' health but can also cause a huge burden on the healthcare system and its resources. There is therefore a need for a plan of action to change and address unhealthy dietary patterns and lifestyles to reduce risks associated with obesity and diet-related chronic diseases. Developing healthy eating practices and encouraging physical

activity from the early stages of life has a significant impact on children's current and future health. There are many determinants of food choice, one of them being nutrition knowledge. Lack of nutrition knowledge and lack of awareness of the important role of a balanced diet may contribute to poor dietary practices. Some studies suggest that nutrition knowledge has the potential to improve food choices and eating habits. In addition, recent evidence suggests that enhancing nutrition knowledge through education-based interventions has been linked to improved dietary habits and food choices.

A cross-sectional study was carried out among undergraduate students studying at the CBE in Kuwait from September 2019 to October 2019. The study was reviewed and approved by the Scientific Ethics Committee at the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training, Kuwait PAAET, Kuwait (number 426/2019). The study was conducted according to the guidelines laid down in the Declaration of Helsinki, and all procedures involving participants were conducted after obtaining agreement.

A variety of classes from different departments were invited to participate in the study. Permission from the professors who showed interest in the study was obtained, and the questionnaire was arranged to be applied at the professors' convenience. The questionnaire was applied in the classroom, with the presence of one of the researchers at all times to answer questions, and under the supervision of the professor. Students were given full details of the study protocol and were informed that participation was anonymous, voluntary, and would not affect their grades. Moreover, students were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time and that answering truthfully was paramount to making the study successful. Respondents excluded from the study were those students who were absent on the day of data collection and those who did not complete the questionnaire appropriately. Informed consent was obtained from all participants.

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Correspondence to: Fawaz Almansour, Kuwait University, Kuwait E-mail: f.almansour@gmail.com

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