

Perception, Knowledge and Practices on Balanced Diet among Adolescents, Their Parents and Frontline Functionaries in Rural Sites of Banda, Varanasi and Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh, India

Authors : Gunjan Razdan, Priyanka Sreenath, Jagannath Behera, S. K. Mishra, Sunil Mehra

Abstract : Uttar Pradesh is one of the poor performing states with high Malnutrition and Anaemia among adolescent girls resulting in high MMR, IMR and low birth weight rate. The rate of anaemia among adolescent girls has doubled in the past decade. Adolescents gain around 15-20% of their optimum height, 25-50% of the ideal adult weight and 45% of the skeletal mass by the age of 19. Poor intake of energy, protein and other nutrients is one of the factors for malnutrition and anaemia. **METHODS:** The cross-sectional survey using a mixed method (quantitative and qualitative) was adopted in this study. The respondents (adolescents, parents and frontline health workers) were selected randomly from 30 villages and surveyed through a semi-structured questionnaire for qualitative information and FGDs and IDIs for qualitative information. A 24 hours dietary recall method was adopted to estimate their dietary practices. A total of 1069 adolescent girls, 1067 boys, 1774 parents and 69 frontline functionaries were covered under the study. Percentages and mean were calculated for quantitative variable, and content analysis was carried out for qualitative data. **RESULTS:** Over 80 % of parents provided assertions that they understood the term balanced diet and strongly felt that their children were having balanced diet. However, only negligible 1.5 % of parents could correctly recount essential eight food groups and 22% could tell about four groups which was the minimum response expected to say respondents had fair knowledge on a balanced diet. Only 10 percent of parents could tell that balanced diet helps in physical and mental growth and only 2% said it has a protective role. Besides, qualitative data shows that the perception regarding balanced diet is having costly food items like nuts and fruits. The dietary intake of adolescents is very low despite the increased iron needs associated with physical growth and puberty. The consumption of green leafy vegetables (less than 35 %) and citrus fruits (less than 50%) was found to be low. **CONCLUSIONS:** The assertions on an understanding of term balanced diet are contradictory to the actual knowledge and practices. Knowledge on essential food groups and nutrients is crucial to inculcate healthy eating practices among adolescents. This calls for comprehensive communication efforts to improve the knowledge and dietary practices among adolescents.

Keywords : anemia, knowledge, malnutrition, perceptions

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