

Implementation of Nutritional Awareness Programme on Eating Habits of Primary School Children

Authors : Gulcin Satir, Ahmet Yildirim

Abstract : Globally, including Turkey, health problems associated with malnutrition and nutrient deficiencies in childhood will remain major public health problems in future. Nutrition is a major environmental influence on physical and mental growth and development in early life. Many studies support the fact that nutritional knowledge makes contribution to wellbeing of children and their school performance. The purpose of this study was to examine nutritional knowledge and eating habits of primary school children and to investigate differences in these variables by socioeconomic status. A quasi-experimental one group pretest/posttest design study was conducted in five primary schools totaling 200 children aging 9-10 years in grade 4 to determine the effect of nutritional awareness programme on eating habits of primary school children. The schools were chosen according to parents' social and demographic characteristics. The implemented nutritional awareness education programme focused on healthy lifestyle such as beneficial foods, eating habits, personal hygiene, physical activity and the programme consisted of eight lessons. The teaching approaches used included interactive teaching, role-playing, demonstration, small group discussions, questioning, and feedback. The lessons were given twice a week for four weeks totaling eight lessons. All lessons lasted 45-60 minutes and first 5 minutes of this was pre-assessment and last 5 minutes post assessment evaluation. The obtained data were analyzed for normality, and the distribution of the variables was tested by the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. Paired t-test was used to evaluate the effectiveness of education programme and to compare the above-mentioned variables in each school separately before and after the lessons. The result of the paired t-test conducted separately for each school showed that on average after eight lessons, there was a 25-32% increase in nutritional knowledge of students regardless of the school they attend to and this rate was significant ($P < 0.01$). This shows that increase in nutritional awareness in these five schools having different socio-economic status was similar to each other. This study suggests that having children involved directly in lessons help to achieve nutritional awareness leading to healthy eating habits. It is concluded that nutritional awareness is a valuable tool to change eating habits. Study findings will provide information for developing nutrition education programmes for the healthy life and obesity prevention in children.

Keywords : children, nutritional awareness, obesity, socioeconomic status

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