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A study on Food and Nutrient Intake of selected school children under Noon meal programme in Madurai

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Abstract

India has the largest child population in the world. All efforts are being made by the Government for the development and welfare of children (Batoool et al., 2012). In order to develop a scientifically sound and economically feasible health status of the children, the best and most effective long-term approach is good nutrition. Nutritional status is the condition of health of an individual as influenced by nutrient intake and utilization in the body. A total of 800 school going children between the age group of 6-13 years from primary schools, middle schools, high schools and higher secondary schools were selected for the study by random sampling method. Out of 800 school children, 400 children who participated in noon meal programme were considered as beneficiaries and other 400 children who did not participate in noon meal programme were considered as non- beneficiaries. To elicit information on socio-economic status, lifestyle, dietary pattern, Food Frequency and health status of the selected population, a specially designed interview schedule was developed. Mean food intake for the beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries of children in the age group of 6-10 years(n=428) and 11-13 years(n=372) were assessed, computed and compared from 24-hour Food recall schedule (ICMR, 2010). Mean nutrient intake for the beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries of children in the age group of 7-9 years(n=200) and 10-12 years (n=200; both boys & girls) were analyzed, computed and compared with Recommended Dietary Allowance (RDA) ICMR 2010.

From the data analysis, Comparison between beneficiary and non-beneficiary of selected children showed that, the mean food and nutrient intake of beneficiaries were better than non-beneficiaries. It might be due to regular intake of noon-meal in the school. But even for the beneficiaries some of the nutrient intake was lesser than ICMR, RDA. So, Children require a quantitatively, qualitatively and nutritionally balanced diet in order to meet the nutrient demands and also to improve the health & nutritional status.

Key words: School children, noon meal, food intake, nutrient intake, nutritional status

1. Introduction

Children constitute principle assets of any country. Children's development is very important for the overall development of society and the best way to develop national human resources is to take care of children. Nutrition is a fundamental pillar of human life, health and development across the entire lifespan. From the earliest stages of foetal development, at birth, through infancy, childhood, adolescence, and into adulthood and old age, proper food and good nutrition are essential for survival, physical growth, mental development, performance and productivity, health and well-being (WHO, 2000). Individuals can be broadly categorized into having optimal nutritional status, or being undernourished, over nourished, and malnourished. It is important to realize that many other life style and environmental factors, in addition to nutrition, influence health and wellbeing, but nutrition is a major, modifiable and powerful factor in promoting health, preventing and treating disease and improving quality of life. (Alim *et. al.*, 2012). An inadequate or imbalanced nutritional intake may not only affect growth and development in childhood but may also have its impact on health problems, such as heart disease later in life (Mansur *et al.*, 2015). The mid-day meal should contain adequate nutrients and should be palatable, hygiene, and operationally feasible. The food safety guidelines are for school level kitchens only, where the mid day meal is cooked for children. Quality assurance of mid day meal and food safety should be an integral part of food handling procedures at the school kitchen. The food provided through these kitchens should be nutritious, free from food adulterants, contamination pathogens, artificial non-food grade colours, and additives and adhere to food safety and quality norms.

Food safety encompasses selection, handling, preparation and storage of food in ways that prevent food borne illness and contamination. This includes a number of routines that should be followed to avoid potentially severe health hazards. (www.mhrd.gov.in/guidelines-foodsafety-and-hygiene-under-mid-day-meal)

Growth is a significant indicator of nutrition status and health as poor diet and frequent infections can lead to growth retardation. So, the aim of the present study is to elicit information on socio- economic status and dietary pattern of the selected subjects as well as to assess the food and nutrient intake of the selected subjects. Nutritional status is the condition of health of an individual as influenced by nutrient intake and utilization in the body.