

ABSTRACT

Introduction - NCDs are the major killer in the world as well as in Sri Lanka. Adolescence is a period that is targeted by the food industry to promote unhealthy products which are rich in high levels of sugar, salt, and fat. The ability to understand food products helps to select healthier food options in packages or containers. The Traffic Light System is the latest food labeling method introduced in Sri Lanka. This study was carried out to assess the knowledge, attitudes and factors associated with colour coding system for sugar, salt, and fat levels in selected food labels among grade 10 students in Type 1AB Government schools of Ambalangoda education zone.

Methodology – A school-based cross-sectional study was conducted in Type 1 AB government schools in Ambalangoda education zone in February 2021 among 507, grade 10 students selected by two staged, stratified cluster sampling method. A pre-tested self-administered questionnaire was used to collect data. A scoring system was used to categorize the knowledge and attitudes into good and poor. Data analysis was done by using software SPSS 26th version.

Results – Response rate was 100.0% (n=507). Male: female ratio was 1.1 (male n=271, 53.5%), (female n=236, 46.5%). Biscuit was the most frequently consumed selected packaged food item for majority of students (n=197, 38.9%) while milk packets were consumed by most of the students (n= 278, 54.8%). Most of the students had consumed those food more frequently at their homes (n=296, 58.4%). Nutrition value was highly prioritized (n=242, 47.7%) by the students while purchasing food items. The majority of students had heard about traffic light system (n=329, 64.9%). Knowledge of Traffic Light System was good among most of the students (n=289, 57%). Among them, a large number of students gained knowledge from their parents (n=183, 36.5%) while school was the second most important source (n=143, 28.2%). Attitudes of students towards this label system were good (n=456, 89.9%). Priority while purchasing food items (p<0.001), Highest education level of the mother (p<0.001), knowing Diabetes mellitus as a NCD (p<0.05) and source of knowledge on Traffic Light System (p<0.001) were significantly associated with good knowledge. Most frequent time of consumption of snacks (p<0.05) and the level of knowledge (p<0.001) were significantly associated with good attitudes.

Conclusion and recommendation – Knowledge and attitudes of the traffic light system of most of the students were satisfactory. Still, school-based awareness programmes need to be conducted regularly to further raise their knowledge as well as new updates relevant to this field. As children are considered as change agents, this effort will be useful in making behavioral changes among parents and in the community.

Keywords – Knowledge, Attitudes, Traffic Light System, Food labels,