



## **EATING BEHAVIOURS AND ASSOCIATED FACTORS AMONG ADOLESCENTS IN GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS IN RATHNAPURA DISTRICT, SRI LANKA**

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### **Abstract**

Adolescence is a period of rapid growth and development, bridging childhood and adulthood. Behaviours adopted during adolescence would continue into adult-life and determine the future health status. Sri Lanka is having a very high disease burden due to diet related non-communicable diseases. Research on adolescent eating behaviours is scarce in the country context. Hence, the objective of this study is to describe eating behaviours and to identify its associated factors among Sri Lankan adolescents. A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted among cluster sampled; 384 secondary school children aged 12-16 years in governments schools in Rathnapura District using a self-administered questionnaire. The validated Sinhala version of 23-item Adolescents Food Habits Checklist (AFHC) was used to assess eating behaviours. Descriptive statistics and independent sample t test were used in data analysis. The level of statistical significance was taken as  $p < 0.05$ . Mean age was 14.33 (SD=2.63) years. The majority were girls (50.8%, N=195), living in rural areas (88.0%, N=338). Mean AFHC score was 15.54, SD=3.62 (min=3; max=23). Significantly higher mean AFHC scores were associated with age <15 years [(M=15.83, SD=3.38)  $t=2.08$ ,  $p=0.037$ ], engaged in moderate to vigorous physical activities (MVPA) of >20 min per day [(M=15.72, SD=3.52)  $t=2.37$ ,  $p=0.018$ ], bringing home made meals [(M=16.54, SD=3.17)  $t=2.62$ ,  $p=0.009$ ] and exposure to childhood healthy food practices [(M=15.63, SD=3.55)  $t=4.14$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ], and school programmes on healthy eating behaviours [(M=15.82, SD=3.51)  $t=4.09$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ]. Aged <15 years, engaged in MVPA of >20 min per day, bringing home-made meals, school programmes on healthy eating, exposure to childhood healthy food practices have a positive influence on healthy eating behaviours among adolescents. Generalizing the findings to be done with caution since only one District was included in the study.

**Keywords:** Adolescents, Family factors, Eating behaviours, Adolescents Food Habits Checklist, Sri Lanka