

Street Food Safety-Related Knowledge and Attitudes among University Students in Sri Lanka: A Cross-sectional Web-Based Study

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Abstract

Street food is considered a significant source of foodborne illnesses. Thus, the safety of street food has come under scrutiny. This study aimed at investigating knowledge and attitudes towards street food safety among university students at a private university in Colombo, Sri Lanka. The data was gathered using a Google Form-based online survey questionnaire. Across six study programs and all academic years, 332 student volunteers were chosen at random. The data was examined using SPSS v. 26. Statistical significance was defined as $p > 0.05$. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used for analysis. One score was assigned for true, and zero for false and uncertain. On a four-level Likert scale, "agree" received 4 points for a correct response and 1 point for an incorrect response. Scores lower than 22, 22 to 35, and higher than 35 are considered low, average, and good knowledge, respectively. Scores below 26, 26 to 35, and above 35 are considered poor, average, and good attitudes, respectively. No significant correlation ($p > 0.05$) was found between food safety knowledge and the socio-demographic parameters evaluated, and there was no significant difference between the knowledge levels of male and female students (p value = 0.267). Only the study program was significantly associated with the total attitude score (p value = 0.002). Most consumers (53.6%) were aware of the risks of food contamination. The least amount of consumers were very concerned about contracting a food-borne illness from street foods (7.2%), willing to change their inappropriate food safety practices (15.7%), and reduce street food consumption after knowing negative effects (15.7%). In conclusion, 89.5% and 48.5% had an average level of knowledge and a poor level of attitudes regarding street food safety, respectively. Thus, continuous food safety education programs are necessary to educate university students.

Keywords: *Street foods, University students, Knowledge, Attitudes, Food safety*