

Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices towards Carcinogenic Foods Consumption and Cancer Prevention among Undergraduate Students of Faculty of Allied Health Sciences, General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University

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Carcinogenic foods pose a considerable risk in cancer prevalence when consumed regularly. Undergraduate students represent a critical group undergoing a significant lifestyle transition, including eating habits and behaviors, making it an opportune time to investigate the nature of carcinogenic food consumption among them. This study aimed to assess the knowledge, attitudes, and practices regarding carcinogenic food consumption among undergraduate students at the Faculty of Allied Health Sciences, General Sir John Kotelawala Defense University, Sri Lanka. A descriptive cross-sectional survey was conducted with 422 students from various disciplines, selected through stratified random sampling and utilizing a pre-tested self-administered questionnaire. Descriptive statistics and Chi-square tests were employed, considering <0.05 as significant. Results indicated that the majority were aged 23 years (29.4%; $n=124$), single, Buddhist female in their second academic year residing in boarding facilities and preparing their own meals. Findings revealed that only 36% ($n=152$) of students had a good understanding of carcinogenic foods, 55.7% ($n=235$) had poor attitudes towards these foods, and 50.7% ($n=214$) practiced good habits related to food consumption and cancer prevention. Significant associations were observed between students' religious affiliation and their knowledge ($p=0.03$), attitudes ($p=0.001$), and practices ($p=0.002$) about carcinogenic foods consumption, while practice was significantly associated with the students' accommodation type ($p=0.02$), food consumption type ($p=0.002$) and their attitudes ($p=0.001$). The study underscores a concerning lack of awareness and suboptimal attitudes towards carcinogenic foods, suggesting the need for targeted interventions to enhance knowledge and foster healthier attitudes to mitigate long-term health risks.

Keywords: *carcinogenic foods, knowledge, attitude, practices*