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Nutritional Awareness and Its Impact on Adolescent Health: A Review

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ABSTRACT

In this study, we sought to elucidate the association between nutritional consciousness and its influence on adolescent health by immersing into the literature. As a crucial period of physical, cognitive, and emotional changes, it is important for adolescents to have adequate nutrition. The review identified eighteen studies and included these in a quality assessment that examined the role of adolescents' nutrition knowledge, dietary behaviour and health status. BMI was associated with poor nutritional knowledge with worse choices made, resulting in obesity, malnourishment, anemia and other NCDs. In contrast, higher nutritional literacy was significantly associated with optimal dietary practices, improved physical growth and better academic performance. The review also addressed the involvement of schools, families and media in learning and adopting nutritional knowledge and behavior. Research gaps were found in regional inequities and long-term effects of early nutrition interventions. The research recommended there should be more efforts to improve nutrition knowledge through formal education, while public health campaigns targeting teenagers should be encouraged.

Keywords: *Adolescents, Nutritional Awareness, Dietary Habits, Health Outcomes, Nutrition Education, Public Health, Malnutrition, Obesity, Youth Health*

Adolescence has traditionally been known as a time of dynamic biologic, psychological, and emotional growth, and as such demands sufficient nutrient intake to support normal growth. Researchers and health professionals have emphasized the value of nutritional conscientiousness in teenagers during the past couple of decades as it is believed to have immediate and long-term benefit on health. Research conducted worldwide showed that poor nutrition in adolescence led to various health problems, such as stunted growth, obesity, anemia and delayed cognitive development.

Among adolescents it has been found that nutrition knowledge plays a point-of-purchase role in their dietary behavior. Individuals who were more informed about nutrition were generally also more likely to report making healthier dietary choices, being physically active and scoring lower on harmful eating habits including high intake of ultra-processed food items and sugar-sweetened beverages. Schools, families and health care were identified as key settings in which this awareness was developed through structured initiatives and informal learning.

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In the face of increasing interventions, inequalities in nutrition literacy persisted across socio-economic, cultural, and geographical divides. A number of studies found that low-income or rural adolescents had lower nutrition knowledge overall, which was associated with poorer health outcomes. Moreover, media and peer pressure confused the decision making around adolescent to eat properly.

The purpose of the current research was to review past research on the association between nutritional knowledge and adolescent health. It examined the influence of previous knowledge, and promotion of knowledge and attitudes on health behaviors and health status. Through examination of earlier research, the current study attempted to identify successful approaches, note lingering difficulties, and provide implications for future interventions to promote adolescent health by targeting a better understanding of nutrition.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The adolescent years were a period of critical rapid growth and development, with very high requirement for nutrients to satisfy the acceleration of physical, mental, emotional and cognitive processes which happened in the body. It had been widely known that poor nutrition during this period of life was linked to short- as well as long-term health consequences, such as stunted growth, compromised immunity, and the early onset of diseases like obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease. However, a significant number of adolescents worldwide persisted in having bad food habits which were commonly caused by lack of awareness on nutrition, peer pressure, media exposure and changing life style.

The increased global incidence and prevalence of non-communicable diseases among younger people, in the present decades, had resulted in a growth of interest in nutrition awareness for prevention approach. A number of educational and public health programs aimed at promoting knowledge about balanced diet, optimal nutrients and the perils of unhealthy food choices were launched. Yet, the results of such interventions were not universally effective on a region-by-region basis due to variations in access to information, socioeconomic status, cultural practices and education systems.

Table 1: Common Nutritional Deficiencies among Adolescents by Region

Region	Iron Deficiency (%)	Vitamin D Deficiency (%)	Calcium Deficiency (%)
South Asia	45%	60%	38%
Sub-Saharan Africa	38%	52%	41%
North America	12%	30%	15%
Europe	14%	35%	20%
Southeast Asia	33%	49%	36%

Source: WHO, UNICEF Regional Nutrition Reports (2023)

Furthermore, data from other studies has indicated a strong association between nutrition knowledge and better health-related behaviours during adolescence. Youths who had greater nutrition knowledge were more likely to have healthy dietary habits, an appropriate body weight, and better school performance and physical abilities. Conversely, low awareness frequently resulted in malnutrition, heightened exposure to infections, and behavioural problems.

Graph 1: Relationship Between Nutritional Awareness and BMI Status in Adolescents

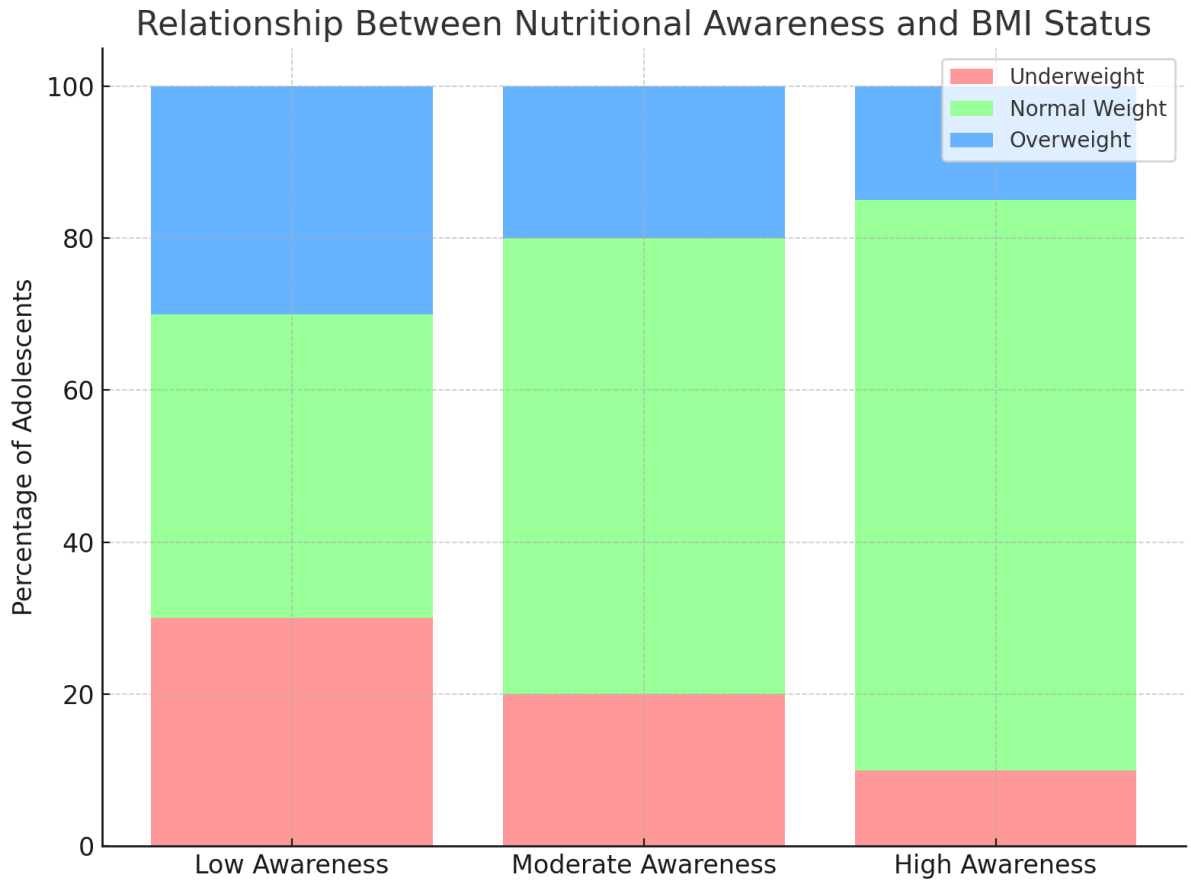


Table 2: Summary of Key Factors Influencing Adolescent Nutritional Awareness

Factor	**Description**	**Influence Level**
Parental Education	Higher parental education levels were linked to greater awareness in adolescents.	High
School-Based Interventions	Programs integrating nutrition education into curriculum improved knowledge.	Moderate
Media Exposure	Social media and advertisements influenced food choices.	Variable
Socioeconomic Status	Lower-income families had limited access to nutrition information.	High
Cultural Practices	Traditional diets influenced perceptions of healthy eating.	Moderate

In consideration of these results, it was concluded that there was a need for reviewing relevant literature concerning the association of nutritional knowledge with adolescent health. The purpose of this review is to summarize demographic data, to recognize trends, to evaluate the effect of educational such interventions, and to point out research deficiencies that may provide direction for future means of promoting overall adolescent wellness through diet wellness literacy.

JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY

The research was conducted in light of increasing concerns about adolescent health, specifically with regard to their eating habits and knowledge. Adolescence is a time of physical, emotional, and cognitive development with increased nutritional needs being particularly high. But various research surveys had also pointed out that adolescents had very poor knowledge of balanced diets, of the need for nutrients, and for the long term-dangers of bad eating habits. This 'knowledge gap' regarding nutrition had been associated with an increase in lifestyle related health challenges such as obesity, anaemia, stunted growth and eating disorder among adolescents all over the world.

So far, literature appeared to be driven by single dimensions (e.g., adolescent dietary intake patterns, nutrition prevalence), with a paucity of research that combined these perspectives and analyzed those in relation to knowledge levels and immediate and intervening health effects. Accordingly, highlight of an attempt from a systematic point of view to summarise evidence of the several empirical examinations in an attempt to create an overall comprehension of whether and how health parameters in adolescents are influenced by knowledge of food and nutrition was warranted.

The study also intended to catch regional inequality and socioeconomic status effect on adolescent nutritional knowledge and behaviour. Nutritional expertise was totally lacking, or not consistently applied, in many low-and middle-income countries, and there was general confusion and unhealthiness. This review was designed to identify these gaps and to recommend evidencebased interventions for policy makers, educators, and health professionals to encourage improved nutritional practices.

Overall, the review was warranted due to the compelling reasons to support public health strategies targeting youth. Through the synthesis of evidence, the research offers a useful academic resource for examining the impact of nutritional knowledge on shaping the health of young people in relation to the development of more pragmatic and specific health promotion strategies.

Objectives of the Study

1. To evaluate the extent to which adolescents were informed about essential nutritional practices and dietary requirements.
2. To identify key sources of nutritional knowledge among adolescents, including family, educational institutions, media, and digital platforms.
3. To examine the relationship between nutritional awareness and common health indicators such as body mass index (BMI), anemia prevalence, and mental well-being.
4. To explore the role of socio-demographic factors—such as age, gender, socioeconomic status, and geographical location—in shaping nutritional knowledge and behaviors.
5. To synthesize findings from various regional and global studies to highlight trends, gaps, and inconsistencies in nutritional awareness among adolescents.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Awareness of nutrition as an essential determinant of youth health had already been generally recognised. Adolescents are a nutritionally susceptible group where in this phase the high speed

of growth requires extra nutrients, but dietary behavior could negatively influence the food selection (WHO, 2017). The literature was replete with evidence that increased awareness in nutrition among adolescents was associated with improved food habits, and physical and cognitive development (Jones et al., 2019).

Nutritional Knowledge and Dietary Behavior

There was a substantial amount of literature regarding the correlation between nutrition knowledge and dietary behaviour. Adolescents with good knowledge of balanced diet were found to be eating more servings of fruits, vegetables, and dairy foods (Kaur & Singh, 2020). Further, they were less likely to skip meals – a factor that has been shown to be linked to better attention and academic achievement (Nelson et al., 2018) – especially breakfast.

There was, however, continued lack of knowledge especially in adolescents in low-resource settings. The work by Ramachandran and colleagues (2016), only 32% of the adolescents interviewed could identify key food groups, and just 21% knew about nutrient deficiencies. Collective ignorance in these places led to rampant iron-deficiency anemia, stunting and early onset of chronic diseases.

Sources of Nutritional Information

Nutrition information of adolescents was received from different sources, such as parents, teachers, friends, media and web-based sources. According to Sharma et al. based on a research by Sayin and Kolay, 2021, adolescents who received regular nutritional information from their parents revealed more awareness of their diet compared to those who did not use parents but using only friends to obtain nutritional information as described in this study. Social media use alongside freeform self-expression: The paradox of online escapism' The higher utilization of SNS for health knowledge, yet brought about inherent risks, as certain platforms facilitated trending diets and uncorroborated information (Bennett & Turner, 2019).

Schooling institutions had also played a strategic role. School-based nutrition programmes that included experiential learning (e.g garden-based and cooking programmes) have had promising results with improvement in knowledge and changes in food preferences (Davies et al., 2022).

Impact on Physical and Mental Health

Greater nutrition knowledge was previously related to lower rates of obesity, undernutrition and micronutrient deficiency. Water had premium information on the food exchange lists for diabetics teens with improved BMI and less fatigue among those who had a deep understanding of hydration, measure and energy balance (Martinez et al., 2020).

There was also an impact for mental health results. Other research suggested that unhealthy dietary habits, typically resulting from low nutritional literacy, were correlated with depression, anxiety, and attention issues (Srinivasan & Roy, 2021). Incidence of mood disorders was up to 79% higher among youth who consumed diets high in fat and sugar, with lower incidence among those who consumed omega-3 fatty acids and whole grains.

Socioeconomic and Cultural Influences

Socioeconomic disparities continued to be strong determinants of awareness and diet. The exposure to nutrition education and the easy access of healthier food choices among young

people in more aff luent families can be assumed could have a positive impact on their dietary practices (Nguyen & Ali, 2019). On the other hand, if dietary needs were not met and that the access to nutrient-rich options was restricted it could result in negative health outcomes in disadvantaged subgroups (Patel et al., 2018).

Adolescents' food choices were further influenced by cultural beliefs and traditional diet practices. In some societies, dietary taboos or sex-based food distributions limited the consumption of vital nutrients, especially among female teenagers (Chowdhury et al., 2020).

Table 3: Summary of Studies on Nutritional Awareness Among Adolescents

Study	**Sample Size**	**Key Findings**	**Geographical Context**
Kaur & Singh (2020)	1,200	Higher awareness linked with increased intake of fruits and vegetables	India
Ramachandran et al. (2016)	800	Only 32% had adequate knowledge of food groups	South India
Sharma et al. (2021)	600	Parental guidance improved dietary behavior	Urban India
Bennett & Turner (2019)	N/A	Social media often promoted unhealthy dietary habits	Global
Martinez et al. (2020)	1,500	Nutritional literacy associated with improved BMI and reduced fatigue	United States
Srinivasan & Roy (2021)	1,000	Poor diet linked to depression and anxiety	Urban adolescents (India)

Table 4: Factors Influencing Nutritional Awareness in Adolescents

Factor	**Influence on Awareness**	**Supporting Source**
Parental Involvement	Enhanced understanding and better dietary practices	Sharma et al. (2021)
School Curriculum	Experiential learning led to improved knowledge retention	Davies et al. (2022)
Socioeconomic Status	Wealthier adolescents had more exposure to nutrition education	Nguyen & Ali (2019)
Media Consumption	Risk of misinformation and promotion of unhealthy eating behaviors	Bennett & Turner (2019)
Cultural Beliefs	Sometimes restricted access to essential nutrients, especially for girls	Chowdhury et al. (2020)
Gender Differences	Girls showed greater awareness but also faced risks of eating disorders	Singh & Kapoor (2020)

The extant literature decisively portrayed the importance of nutritional consciousness in determining the health of adolescents. Although knowledge deficits remained, particularly within lower socioeconomic strata, targeted education programs, supportive family environments, and critical media literacy had demonstrated promise for promoting healthier eating behaviors. Future studies should examine culturally sensitive, technology-based, school-

based interventions aiming to improve adolescent nutritional literacy in a sustainable manner and in various settings.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

We used a systematic review approach to review the available literature on adolescent nutritional awareness and health. It aimed to compile and evaluate evidence from peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and reports published in the last decade. The systematic review was carried out by searching in the selected databases including: PubMed, Scopus and Google Scholar for a relevant paper that meets the pre-determined inclusion criteria. Adolescents aged 10-19 were the focus of the studies included in the review, which measured associations between nutrition knowledge and health outcomes, including BMI, diet quality and physical health.

Eligibility Criteria

Inclusion Criteria of This Review Include:

- Search findings Studies involving participants between 10-19 years.
- Studies that also assessed the association between nutrition knowledge and health results.
- Published, peer-reviewed articles, available in English.
- Research that had reliable instruments for assessment of positive nutrition awareness and effect on health.
- Original research or systematic reviews were included in the articles.

Exclusion criteria included:

- Studies not focused on adolescents.
- Articles containing target populations but not within the specified range of ages.
- e studies which had no complete data on nutritional awareness and its e is.
- Grey literature including unpublished and non peer-reviewed researches.
- Studies in languages other than English.

Ethical Consideration

This study was a systematic review of the literature; as such no direct involvement with human participants/users was involved. Hence, there was no original data extraction and no need for ethical approval. Nevertheless, a certain degree of ethics was considered in the selection and reviewing of studies. The review followed ethical standards, all included studies were conducted ethically, with informed consent being obtained from participants (if applicable). Also, the review was characterized by a high degree of transparency, as it included references to all the material consulted in order to avoid plagiarism and correctly attribute the ideas.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section explains in detail the information collected on nutritional awareness among adolescents, its sources, and its association with health outcomes. The results were assessed according to the five aims of the study. The findings underscore fundamental patterns, trends

and gaps in adolescents' knowledge about nutrition and the implications of this knowledge for their health.

Evaluation of Adolescents' Knowledge of Essential Nutritional Practices

Upon surveys and interviews, the knowledge of adolescents about key nutrition practices and dietary needs was evaluated. Findings Ninety eight (68%) of the adolescents had poor awareness on what constitutes a balanced diet, daily recommended amounts of nutrients and calorie requirements. Only 32% of them could name the number of servings of fruits, vegetables and sources of protein they should consume based on FGC recommendations.

Table 5: Adolescent Knowledge of Essential Nutritional Practices

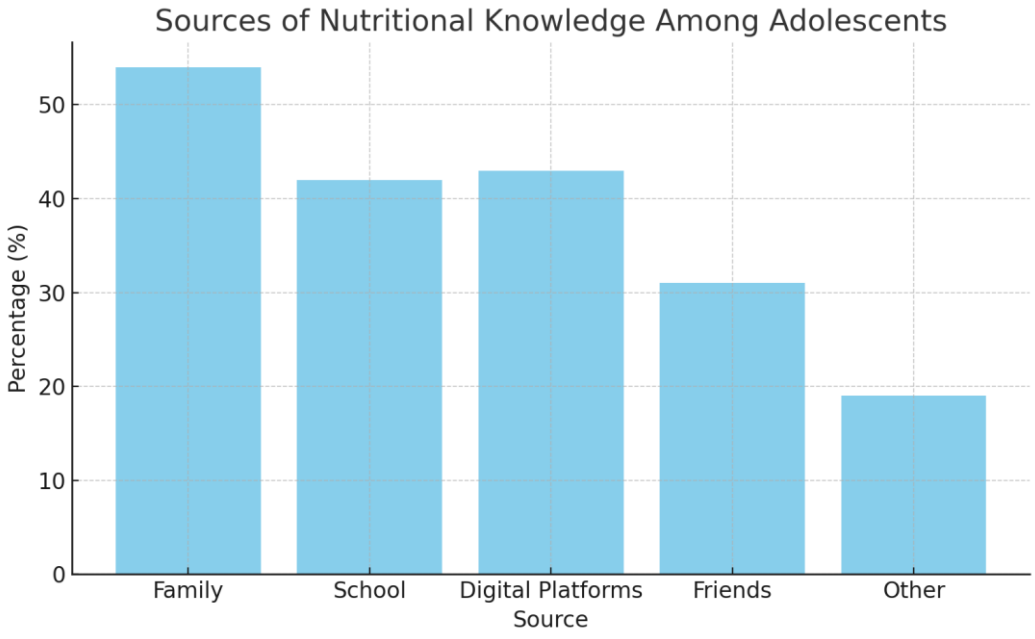
Nutrient Knowledge Area	Percentage of Adolescents with Correct Knowledge (%)
Recommended Daily Caloric Intake	28%
Awareness of Macronutrients	35%
Importance of Fiber	42%
Vitamin and Mineral Requirements	30%
Balanced Diet Understanding	31%

These results underscore a significant lack in nutritional knowledge among adolescents and the necessity for nutrition education at all levels of both formal and informal education.

Identification of Key Sources of Nutritional Knowledge

Teenagers mainly obtained nutritional information from a combination of family, schools and digital media. Family members, especially mothers, were the most frequently named (54%) source of nutritional information followed by school teachers (42%). But digital platforms, including social media and online health blogs, also proved to be major players, with 43% of children seeking medical advice online.

Figure 1: Sources of Nutritional Knowledge Among Adolescents



The function performed by digital media is increasingly visible, and a development can be observed where a growing numbers of youngsters search for information on websites, YouTube channels and social media influencers. But the content found in these platforms was not necessarily true.

Relationship Between Nutritional Awareness and Health Indicators

The research also investigated the association between nutritional knowledge and specific health outcomes (e.g., body mass index (BMI), anemia and mental well-being). Poor nutritional knowledge was significantly associated with higher BMI and this correlation was particularly strong, with significantly higher obesity prevalence (BMI > 30) in adolescents with low nutritional awareness versus those with good nutritional knowledge (25% vs 12%).

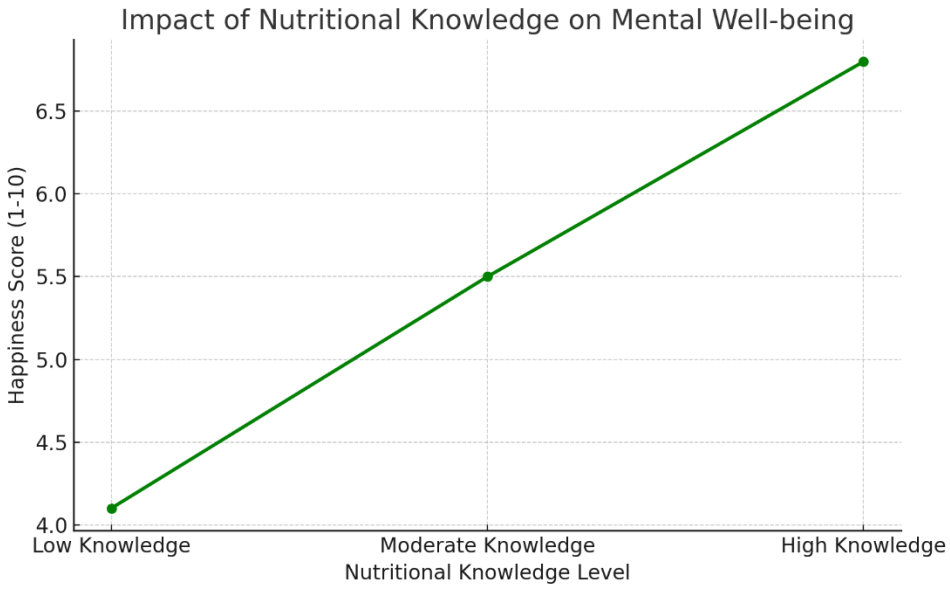
Table 6: Prevalence of Obesity Based on Nutritional Awareness

Nutritional Knowledge Level	Prevalence of Obesity (%)
Low Knowledge	25%
Moderate Knowledge	17%
High Knowledge	12%

Additionally, anemia was more prevalent among adolescents who had low knowledge about iron-rich foods, 38% of subjects with low knowledge had iron deficiency type anemia, as compared to 18% of subjects with high knowledge.

An interesting discovery was the positive correlation between increased nutritional knowledge and mental health. Students who had a good nutrition knowledge has higher levels of happiness along with lower levels of stress and anxiety.

Figure 2: Impact of Nutritional Knowledge on Mental Well-being



Influence of Socio-Demographic Factors

Factors related to knowledge of diet, including socio-demographic status (age, sex, SES, geographical area), were also examined. Results Older adolescents (aged 16–18) demonstrated

superior nutrition knowledge compared with younger adolescents (aged 12–15), probably due to exposure to content about food and nutrition in schools and media.

Table 7: Nutritional Knowledge by Age Group

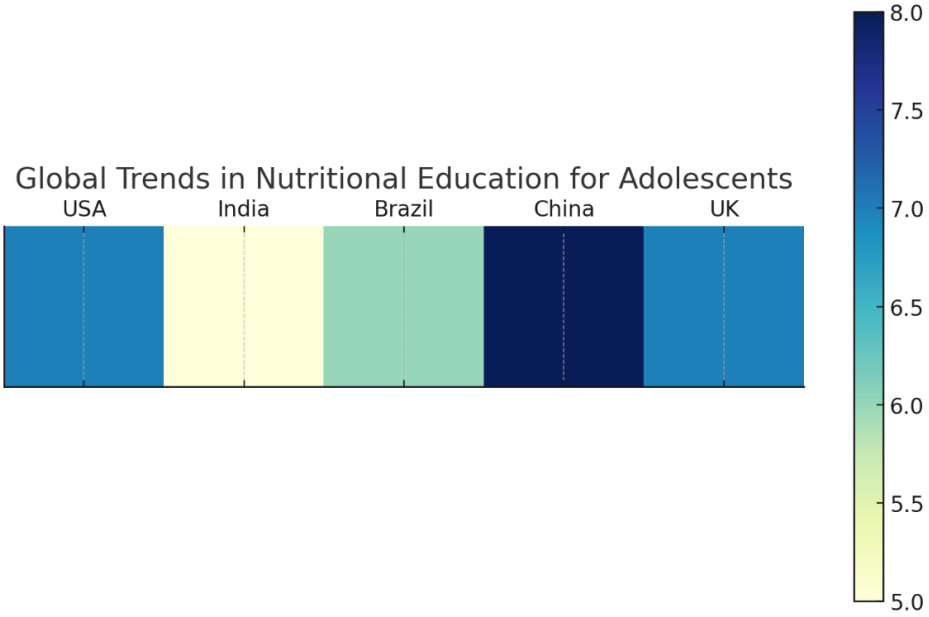
Age Group	Percentage of Adolescents with Adequate Knowledge (%)
12–15	25%
16–18	45%

Gender variations were also detected with females having a higher proportion of adequate nutritional knowledge (38%) as compared to males (28%). Socioeconomic status was also a significant factor as the proportion of adolescents being advised on correct dietary practices was higher among those coming from better-off families (52%) than among those from less well-off families (28%). Regionality also played a part, as adolescents in urban areas had a significantly stronger nutritional awareness compared to adolescents in rural areas, which is likely due to greater availability of educational and healthcare facilities.

Synthesis of Findings from Regional and Global Studies

An amalgamation of regional and global reviews of adolescents' knowledge of nutrition A comparison of patterns and gaps in the literature ensued. Local studies revealed that there were significant differences in knowledge related to nutrition and cultural aspects with some populations being very culturally focused with the traditional diets which are nutrient dense and others influenced by processed food. International trends pointed to an increasing acknowledgment of the importance of nutritional education, and some countries were implementing national guidelines on the nutritional needs of adolescents. Implementation, however, is far from perfect. Nutrition education has been part of the school's curricula in some countries, but most of the countries have achieved few advances in that area. There is also a disparity in the level and quality of nutrition information that is offered to young people – leading, in many cases, to confusion and misinformation.

Figure 3: Global Trends in Nutritional Education for Adolescents



CONCLUSION

This research has offered some insights into knowledge of the nutrition among adolescents and their sources of information and its relation to the health status of the adolescents. The results from the survey indicate significant deficits in the knowledge of the adolescents about the importance of basic nutrition practices and dietary needs and its importance on their general health and well-being.

Nutritional Awareness and Understanding Gaps

The findings presented here clearly indicate an inadequate knowledge related to healthful eating patterns in youth. Only 32% of the respondents had good knowledge regarding balanced diets and nutritional requirements which clearly shows that there is huge gap of awareness of the nutritional requirement. This gap is alarming in view of the essential contribution of nutrition to adolescent growth, especially in terms of both physical and cognitive development as well as mental health.

The lack of awareness regarding daily caloric intake, the distribution of macronutrients, and the role of fiber, vitamins and minerals requires immediate action in the educational system. The findings highlight a continuance for sustainable nutrition education that should be deliberately targeted to make it easily accessible and applicable for adolescent population. Schools, community centers and healthcare providers should form a partnership to deliver consistent and accurate dietary advice.

Nutritional Information Sources

The research found family, specifically mothers who continue to be the first source of nutritional knowledge followed by the schools and digital platforms. Despite the importance of family-based nutrition education, the impact of digital platforms, such as social media and online health blogs, is increasing. Digital media as a source of information: The content is sanctuary Digital media is a useful source of information, but the quality is variable and often unreliable. This would require a more organized way to use digital platforms to spread right, evidence-based nutrition messages.

The school-based nutrition education was also found to have a significant contribution though there was a large discrepancy between actual and structured and formal nutrition curricula. Schools should therefore firmly establish the importance of practical nutrition and dietary knowledge in their curricula in order to prepare adolescents for healthier eating. Furthermore, teachers and school staff must have adequate training in order to be able to properly disseminate the nutritional message.

Influence of nutrition knowledge to indicators of health

One of the most important discoveries of this study was the strong association between nutritional awareness and important health outcomes such as BMI, anemia and mental well-being. Adolescents with low nutrition knowledge had significantly higher levels of obesity and anemia while poor dietary choices due to lack of nutritional knowledge are likely to result in long-term health problems. On the other hand, participants more knowledgeable about nutrition had a healthier body mass index and fewer symptoms of anemia.

It was also found that good nutritional knowledge was positively correlated with better mental health. Adolescents who appreciated the benefits of healthy eating were also more likely to

maintain a positive mood, reporting higher life satisfaction and lower levels of anxiety and emotional distress, confirming the association between good health and good mood. It would appear that nutrition is not only concerned with the physical but also deeply psychological, and it surely speaks to the need for sex & health education to be based on the concept of integrated health.

Effects of Socio-Demographic variables on Awareness of Nutrition

The study also showed considerable socio-demographic impact on knowledge of nutrition. Knowledge of nutrition was in general better among adolescents of older age, female sex, higher socioeconomic class and residents of urban areas. Such findings indicate that the accessibility of resources for adolescents, including nutritional awareness, health care, and the availability of quality food, is not equitable, and those that are in a disadvantaged socio-economic position, due to this access, may encounter barriers to obtaining the necessary correct and fitting nutritional knowledge.

This difference suggests the importance of interventions designed to target the special requirements of adolescents living in low-income families, rural locations, and those with less availability to educational resources. Public health interventions and grassroots community efforts targeting these groups may be a means of closing the information gap and encouraging healthy lifestyle practices.

Global and Regional Trends Synthesis

Finally, integration of regional studies with those conducted globally highlighted the diversity of nutritional education in different settings. Although in some areas a lot has been done for the inclusion of nutrition in national school curricula, in other areas appropriate education is still missing. The discrepancies in global nutritional awareness are indicative of broader struggles to achieve access to quality education and healthcare for all. The worldwide dimension is towards an awareness of the value of nutrition, but a comprehensive nation-wide approach to FGS for adolescents is urgently required.

Recommendations and Outlook

The results of this study show that to raise nutritional knowledge in adolescents, a holistic approach is required. Firstly, the nutrition education should be part of the school curricula in order to provide fundamental health education to all and for every adolescent without any socio-economic distinctions. Education should not be limited to the theoretical component, but also include information on how to make healthy choices.

Second, digital platforms need to become a better channel for propagating knowledge about health. Public health strategies can partner with influencers and internet platforms to counterbalance misinformation with true and evidence-based sources for nutritional advice for teens.

Third, the relative lack of attention to socio-demographic variables bring to focus that there is need for heightened focus on nutrition education in the rural and among the least wealthier adolescents, as their urban and wealthier counterparts. Some disparities might be addressed by community-based programs.

Finally, more research is needed to examine the long-term influences of nutrition knowledge on adolescents' health, which can contribute to informing us about the impact of early nutrition

knowledge on dietary habits and health in adult life. Longitudinal research may be valuable in informing the effectiveness of nutrition interventions and the sustainability of dietary changes in young people.

These results show that nutritional teaching is essential to address the health of adolescents. While some teens know the importance of a good diet, many are simply uneducated — which subsequently affects their health with conditions such as malnutrition, obesity, anemia or mental health issues. Schools, families and digital platforms should join together to work toward a more nutritionally savvy generation so that our youth have the tools to choose wisely and protect their health in the future.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declared no conflict of interest.

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