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Implementation of nutritional awareness program on eating habits of primary school children

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Statement of the Problem: Globally, including Turkey, health problems associated with malnutrition and nutrient deficiencies in childhood will remain major public health problems in future. Many studies support, the fact that nutritional knowledge makes contribution to wellbeing of children and their school performance. The purpose of this study was to examine nutritional knowledge and eating habits of primary school children and to investigate differences in these variables by socioeconomic status.

Methodology & Theoretical Orientation: A quasi-experimental one group pre-test/post-test design study was conducted in five primary schools totaling 200 children aging 9-10 years in grade-4 to determine effect of nutritional awareness program on eating habits of primary school children. The schools were chosen according to parents' social and demographic characteristics. Implemented nutritional awareness education program focused on healthy life style and the program consisted of eight lessons. The teaching approaches used included interactive teaching, role playing, demonstration, small group discussions and feedback.

Finding: The obtained data were analyzed for normality and the distribution of the variables was tested by the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. Paired t-test was used to evaluate effectiveness of education program and to compare the above-mentioned variables in each school separately before and after the lessons. Result of the paired t-test conducted separately for each school showed that on average after eight lessons, there was a 25-32% increase in nutritional knowledge of students regardless of school they attend to and this rate was significant ($P < 0.01$). This shows that increase in nutritional awareness in these five schools having different socio-economic status was like each other.

Conclusion & Significance: This study suggests that having children involved directly in lessons help achieving nutritional awareness leading to healthy eating habits. Study findings will provide information for developing nutrition education programs for healthy life and obesity prevention in children.

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