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Nutritional Status of Vegetarian Adolescents Aged 16-19 Years from National and Provincial Schools in Jaffna Zonal Division of Education

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The objective of this study was to assess the nutritional status of G.C.E (A/L) vegetarian adolescents from Jaffna zonal schools. A cross sectional sampling was used to identify a sample that represents the students aged 16 to 19 years. A total of 410 students (193 males and 217 females) were included in this study from 20 schools (4 national and 16 provincial schools). Among the students, 35 students were selected for this study. Anthropometric measurements of weight and height were measured in all the students. Blood was collected for biochemical analysis (total protein, albumin and haemoglobin). In this study, prevalence of stunting among vegetarians was 5.7%, whereas prevalence of stunting and severe stunting in non-vegetarians was 9.1 and 0.8% respectively. Prevalence of severe thinness was 5.7 and 3.2% in vegetarians and non-vegetarians respectively. Prevalence of obesity (1.3%) and severe obesity (0.3%) were found only among non-vegetarians. Prevalence of anaemia was 30.3 and 32.8% in vegetarians and non-vegetarians respectively. The anaemia was low in vegetarian females (28.6%) than in non-vegetarian females (45.7%). Prevalence of protein deficiency among non-vegetarians and vegetarians were 0.8% and 3.0% respectively. Thus, the prevalence of stunting, anemia and obesity were higher among non-vegetarians than vegetarians while prevalence of severe thinness and protein deficiency were higher among vegetarians. Revisiting the dietary pattern of the students is recommended to further understand the above conditions in non-vegetarian students.

Keywords: Adolescents, Vegetarians, Anemia, Thinness, Stunting, and obesity.