

Awareness and Consumption of Millets among School Children in Rural and Urban Areas of Telangana State, India

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ABSTRACT: Millet production and consumption has declined over the years due to various factors. The change in dietary practices resulted in nutritional disorders and other health problems. Recently, millets have gained popularity due to its health advantages and low agriculture inputs, less irrigation facilities, ability to mitigate climate change and capacity for food and nutritional security. To understand the present scenario of millet awareness and consumption, a study was conducted in Telangana state. The present study aimed to assess the millet awareness and consumption among school children in rural and urban areas of Telangana state. A cross-sectional design was adopted and questionnaires were employed to examine millet awareness and consumption among rural and urban areas of Mahabubnagar and Medak districts in Telangana state were selected. Students in the 8th and 9th grades from rural (n=160) and urban (n=160) areas in both districts were recruited for the study. To find the association between categorical variables a Chi-square test was used. It was found that more than half of the respondents (56.25%) stated that they were aware of millets, whereas the remaining 43.75% stated that they were unaware of millets. It was also observed that out of 56.25% of school children who reported being aware of millets, 23.75% stated that they were aware of sorghum, pearl millet and finger millet. There was a significant association between millet awareness and consumption among school children in rural and urban areas at 5% level. These results suggested that awareness on millets contribute in millet consumption among the school children. Therefore, nutrition education on millets needs to be undertaken to create awareness among the students, thus, it may further can help in millet consumption.

Keywords: millets, millet awareness, millet consumption, school children, Telangana.

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is the period of life between the age of 10-19 and usually, school children come under the category of adolescence, according to United Nations. Today, there are 1.3 billion adolescents worldwide, accounting for 16% of the global population (UNICEF, 2022). Adolescence is the transitional stage of life from infancy to adulthood, during which teenagers experience a growth spurt with a rapid increase in height and weight, as well as psychological and cognitive development. A study conducted in India by Bassi *et al.* (2021), stated that both school and college children spend the majority of their time in an unhealthy food environment, which includes the availability of High in Fat, Salt and Sugar (HFSS) foods and beverages in the canteen and around schools via

vendors, increased number of vendors outside the school and exposure to HFSS advertisements. Also, globalization has resulted in lifestyle changes, particularly in eating habits and food preferences. Poor nutrition and unhealthy dietary practices have been linked to poor outcomes such as mortality and morbidity, as well as the prevalence of chronic diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and hypertension. Among 10-14 years girls, anaemia is a severe public health problem in eight states including Jharkhand, Tripura, West Bengal, Assam, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Telangana and Uttar Pradesh, while only West Bengal has a severe anaemia problem among 14 years old boys. Moreover, the micronutrient deficiencies are also prevalent in India, with 50% of girls suffering from three of six micronutrient deficiencies (vitamin D, iron

and folate). Noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) kill 41 million people every year, accounting for 74% of all deaths worldwide. Cardiovascular diseases account for most NCD deaths, or 17.9 million people annually, followed by cancers (9.3 million), chronic respiratory diseases (4.1 million), and diabetes (2.0 million including kidney disease deaths caused by diabetes). These four groups of diseases account for more than 80% of all premature NCD deaths (UNICEF, 2022). Also, it was indicated that the non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular risk and hypertension are rapidly increasing among adolescents (CNNS, 2019).

Millets are the traditional crops from civilization and used for food, animal feed or fodder. They are one of the major food crops, grown in more than 100 countries in the world and mainly grown in the semiarid tropic areas of developing countries like Asia and Africa particularly in India, Mali, Nigeria, with 97% of production. India is the largest-producer of millets, accounting for more than 80% of Asia's production. Millets are often referred to as "Nutri-Cereals" due to their abundance of essential nutrients, including protein, dietary fibre, minerals, vitamins, and antioxidants. These nutrients help to control diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, cancer, celiac disease, and ageing. It was also noted in the study by Durairaj *et al.* (2019) that millets help in improving the height, weight and haemoglobin level of school children. The advent of the green revolution in the 1960s led to a decline in millet production and consumption. Several authors have highlighted that there was a decline in millet production and an increase in rice production from 1961 to 2017 (Food and Agricultural Organization, 2019; Smith *et al.*, 2019; John and Babu, 2021); thus, rice became the staple food of the country. The green revolution "pushed out" the intake of nutrient-dense coarse cereals and pulses by increasing the availability and affordability of rice and wheat. Rice and wheat became more affordable and easier to prepare. The area and production of minor millets have also declined due to cultivation of cereals, pulses and commercial cash crops (Satish Kumar *et al.*, 2022). As a consequence, millets have become a poor man's diet and were neglected by the community. The agricultural yield of major cereals has increased due to the use of fertilizer, pesticides and groundwater resources. However, the overuse of fertilizers and pesticides led the soil to become more infertile and has led to severe health effects on human beings (Eliazer Nelson, *et al.*, 2019). Additionally, it was found that refined grains, including refined white rice, are associated with non-communicable diseases such as type II diabetes and obesity (Kane-Potaka *et al.*, 2021; Radhika *et al.*, 2009).

Globally, millet has gained popularity due to its health advantages, low agriculture inputs, less irrigation facilities, ability to mitigate climate change and capacity for food and nutritional security. Millets helped to improve stunting and body mass index in school children who consumed them for three months (Anitha *et al.*, 2019) found that. Millets have the ability to address current global health and nutritional

challenges. United Nations (UN) also recognized millet potential and declared it as International Year of Millets -2023 to promote millet production and consumption across the world. Given the knowledge that no research has been undertaken on awareness and consumption of millets among school children in Telangana state. Therefore, this study aims to assess the awareness and consumption of millets among school children in Telangana state.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Study design. A cross-sectional study design was followed for this study. Mahabubnagar and Medak districts were purposively selected based on the highest production of millets in Telangana compared to other districts in the state. The selection of these two districts was based on the highest millet production, which helps children to learn from their environment and allows them to utilize the food they have access to. One mandal was selected from each district, namely Jadcherla from Mahabubnagar district and Narsapur from Medak district, using a simple random sampling technique by lottery method. In this study, mandal headquarters was selected to represent the urban population of the respective mandal. Thus, a total of two mandals were selected for the study. From each mandal, two villages were selected by using a simple random sampling technique with lottery method. Thus, a total of four villages were selected for the study. A total of three schools from each mandal, one school from mandal headquarters as urban sample and two schools from two villages as rural sample were selected.

Participants and recruitment. The sample comprised of 320 (8th and 9th grade) students from Zilla Parishad High Schools (ZPHS) in two districts, namely Mahabubnagar and Medak. In each district, 80 sample from rural schools and 80 sample from urban schools were randomly selected, thus constituting a total of 320 school children. To conduct research activity in schools respective school headmasters were contacted and approval was taken through a formal letter. A questionnaire was used to collect data on the awareness and consumption of millets. Before administering the schedule, the respondents were given an introduction to the topic and the purpose of this topic. The questionnaire was personally administered in each grade with prior instructions to complete it. The data collection was done in the year 2021.

Procedures, and data analysis. A questionnaire was designed to gather data on profile characteristics such as age, gender, education, millet consumption and millet awareness of school children. Data on millet consumption was collected through a 7-point Likert scale (7-daily, 6-once in a week, 5-once in a month, 4-once in three months, 3-once in six months, 2-once in a year and 1-never). Millet awareness responses were recorded on two-point continuum *i.e.* Yes-1 and No-0. Descriptive statistics were provided for variables such as age, gender, education, millet consumption and millet awareness, frequency and percentages were calculated in Microsoft Excel. The association between millet awareness and consumption was analyzed using

Pearson's Chi-square analysis. The SPSS package was used to analyze the data. A level of $P < 0.05$ was considered significant.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

General profile of the respondents. Table 1 shows the distribution of respondents in rural and urban areas. Of the total 320 school children surveyed, 160 (50%) were from the rural area and 160 (50%) were from the urban area. The mean age of respondents (for both male and female) in rural areas was 13.98. However, in urban

areas, the mean age of respondents was 14.24 and it was higher than the mean age of rural respondents. In rural areas, 44.40% (n=160) of the respondents were male, while 55.62% were female respondents. In urban areas, 22.50% (n=160) of the respondents were male, while 77.50% were female. There were more female respondents in both rural and urban areas compared to male respondents. The respondents were equally chosen from both 8th(n=160) and 9thgrades (n=160) from rural and urban areas.

Table 1: Profile characteristics of school children in rural and urban area.

Variables	Rural (n=160) Frequency (%)	Urban (n=160) Frequency (%)	Total (320) Frequency (%)
Age (in years)			
12 -14	70 (43.75)	34 (21.25)	104 (32.50)
14- 16	84 (52.50)	119 (74.38)	203 (63.44)
16 & above	06 (3.75)	07 (4.37)	13 (4.06)
Gender			
Male	71 (44.38%)	36 (22.50)	107 (33.44%)
Female	89 (55.62%)	124 (77.50%)	213 (66.56%)
Education			
8 th grade	80 (50%)	80 (50%)	160 (50%)
9 th grade	80 (50%)	80 (50%)	160 (50%)

Source: Field survey by the first author in 2021

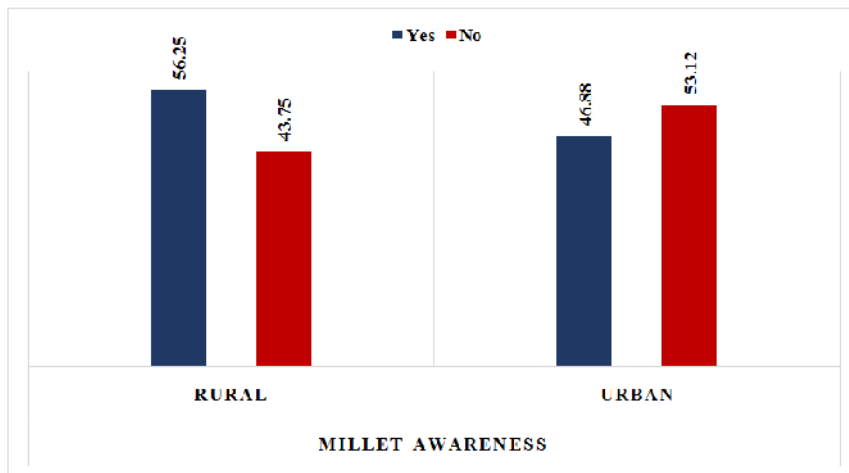
Awareness on different types of millets in rural and urban areas. Fig. 1 shows the distribution of respondents according to their millet awareness. The data revealed that in rural area (n=160) more than half of the respondents (56.25%) stated that they were aware of millets, whereas the remaining 43.75% stated that they were unaware of millets. The distribution of respondents according to their awareness on different types of millets was shown in Table 2. Out of 56.25% of school children who reported being aware of millets, 23.75% stated that they were aware of sorghum, pearl millet and finger millet, whereas 10.62% stated that they were aware of sorghum and finger millet, followed by sorghum (8.13%), sorghum and pearl millet (7.50%), sorghum, pearl millet, finger millet, foxtail millet, and little millet (3.75%) and an equal proportion of school children were aware of sorghum, pearl millet and foxtail (1.25%), and sorghum, pearl millet, finger millet, proso millet, barnyard millet (1.25%) (Fig. 2). In contrast, in urban area, more than half of the respondents (53.12%) stated that they were unaware of

millets, while the remaining 46.88% stated that they were aware of millets.

Out of 46.88% of school children who reported being aware of millets, 21.25% stated that they were aware of sorghum, pearl millet and finger millet, followed by other millets (8.12%), sorghum (7.50%), sorghum and finger millet (4.38%), sorghum and pearl millet (3.12%), sorghum, pearl millet, finger millet, foxtail millet, and little millet (1.25%) and an equal proportion of school children were aware of sorghum, pearl millet and finger millet (0.63%). The results were supported by the study of Lalitha *et al.* (2022) that both in Mahabubnagar and Nalgonda districts, the majority of the respondents had low level of millet knowledge (73.33% and 88.00%), followed by medium level (20.67% and 7.33%) and high level (6.00% and 4.67%). The possible reason could be due to decline in production and consumption of millets in households, which resulted in unaware of most of the millets among school children.

Table 2: Awareness on the different types of millets in rural and urban.

Type of Millet	Rural (n=160)		Urban (n=160)	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Sorghum	13	8.13	12	7.50
Sorghum, Finger millet	17	10.62	7	4.38
Sorghum, Pearl millet	12	7.50	05	3.12
Sorghum, Pearl millet, Foxtail millet	2	1.25	01	0.63
Sorghum, Pearl millet, Finger millet	38	23.75	34	21.25
Sorghum, Pearl millet, Finger millet, Foxtail millet, Little millet	6	3.75	02	1.25
Sorghum, Pearl millet, Finger millet, Proso millet, Barnyard millet	2	1.25	01	0.63
Others	-	-	13	8.12
Not aware	70	43.75	85	53.12
Grand Total	160	100	160	100



Rural = 160, Urban =160

Fig. 1. Distribution of school children according to their millet awareness.

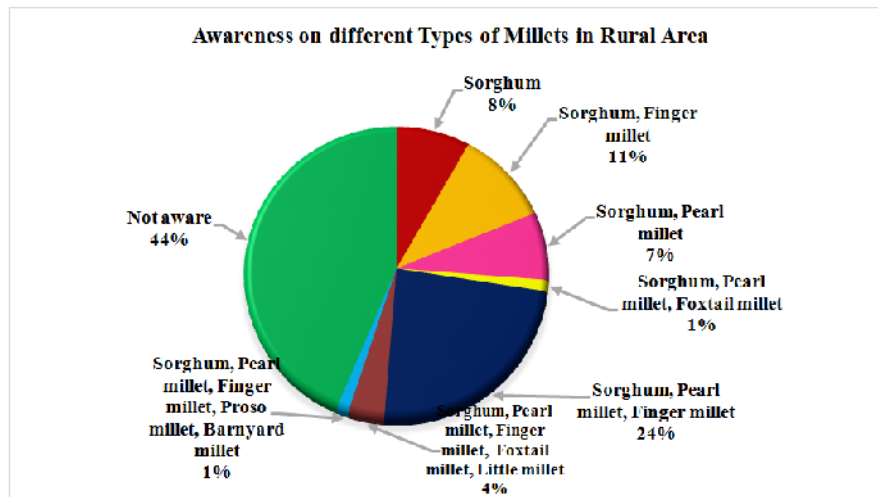


Fig. 2. Awareness on different types of millets in rural area (n=160).

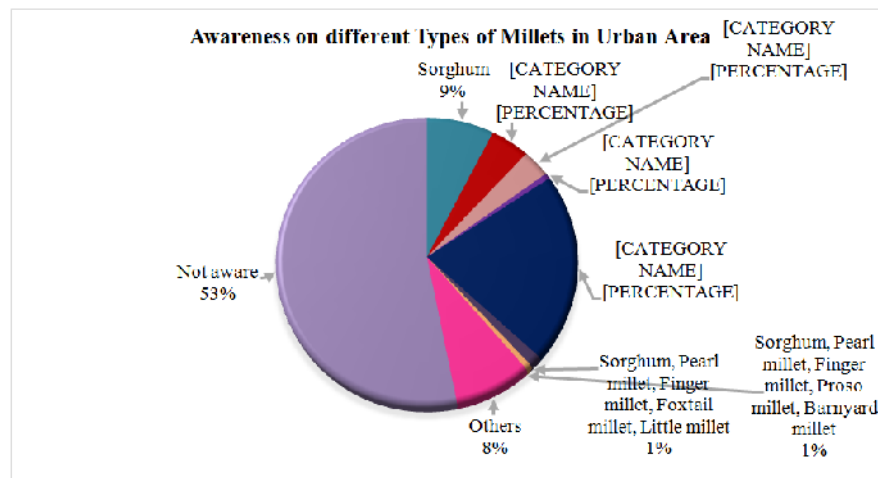


Fig. 3. Awareness on different types of millets in urban area (n=160).

Consumption of millets in rural and urban areas.

The data regarding the consumption of millets in rural and urban areas were shown in Table 3&4. Considering the millet consumption in rural areas, 25.00% of school children consumed sorghum once a week, followed by once in a month (21.88%), daily (18.12%), once in six months (7.50%), once in three months (5.00%) and yearly (1.25%), while 21.25% of school children never consumed sorghum. Similarly in urban areas, 21.87% of school children consumed sorghum once in a month, followed by once a week (21.25%), once in three months (19.37%), once in six months (4.38%), and yearly (2.50%), while 30.63% never consumed in urban areas.

With regard to pearl millet, in rural areas, most school children (49.38%) never consumed it. Others consumed it once in six months (18.12%), once in three months (15.00%), once a month (10.00%), and once a year (7.50%). In urban area, nearly half of the respondents (71.88%) expressed that they never consumed it. However, 12.50% consumed it once in three months, 6.25% consumed it once in a month, 5.62% consumed it once in six months, yearly (3.12%) and meagre proportion of respondents (0.63%) consumed it once a week, whereas most of the respondents (71.88%) never consumed it.

Regarding finger millet consumption, more than half of the school children (55.63%) never consumed them, followed by once in three months (17.50%), once in a month (7.50%), yearly (5.62%), once a week (2.50%) and once in six months (1.25%). Similar trend was observed in urban area that more than half of the respondents (77.50%) never consumed, followed by the respondents who consumed it once in three months (17.50%), once in six months (11.25%), once in a month (7.50%), yearly (5.62%), while only 2.50% consumed it once a week.

In terms of foxtail millet, the majority of school children (89.38%) never consumed them, followed by once in three months (5.00%) and an equal proportion of school children consumed it once in a month (1.87%) and yearly (1.87%), while just 0.63% consumed once in six months. In urban areas, approximately 93.75% of respondents never consumed it, whereas it was consumed yearly (1.88%), once in six months (1.87%), once in three months (1.25%) and once in a month (1.25%).

In addition, the data revealed that majority of respondents never consumed few millets such as barnyard millet, brown top millet, proso millet, kodo millet, little millet in both rural and urban areas, whereas only few respondents consumed it yearly. There was no noticeable difference in consumption of these millets in rural and urban areas.

These results revealed that rural respondents consumed it more frequently than urban respondents. Sorghum was the most often eaten millet in rural and urban areas; this might be due to sorghum production and availability in the areas, and people depended more on locally cultivated crops. Other millets were neglected by the respondents. It could be due to the fact that in both rural and urban areas, people depend more on other food grains such as rice and wheat. This led to decline in the millet consumption among the respondents and these results are consistent with Kane-Potaka and Kumar (2019); Bhagavatula *et al.* (2013), that millet consumption has decreased over the last two decades as a result of the implementation of government initiatives to boost the production and consumption of rice and wheat, change in consumer tastes and preferences, urbanization, and increased income.

Table 3: Consumption of millets in rural area (n=160).

Millets	Daily (%)	Once a week (%)	Once in a month (%)	Once in three months (%)	Once in six months (%)	Yearly (%)	Never (%)
Sorghum	18.12	25.00	21.88	5.00	7.50	1.25	21.25
Pearl Millet	0	0	10.00	15.00	18.12	7.50	49.38
Finger Millet	0	2.50	7.50	17.50	1.25	5.62	55.63
Foxtail Millet	0	1.25	1.87	5.00	0.63	1.87	89.38
Little Millet	0	0	0	0	0	5.00	95.00
Kodo Millet	0	0	0	0	0	2.50	97.50
Proso Millet	0	0	0	0	0	0	100
Barnyard Millet	0	0	0	0	0	0	100
Browntop Millet	0	0	0	0	0	0	100

Table 4: Consumption of millets in urban area (n=160).

Millets	Daily (%)	Once a week (%)	Once in a month (%)	Once in three months (%)	Once in six months (%)	Yearly (%)	Never (%)
Sorghum	0	21.25	21.87	19.37	4.38	2.50	30.63
Pearl Millet	0	0.63	6.25	12.50	5.62	3.12	71.88
Finger Millet	0	1.87	3.13	6.25	2.50	8.75	77.50
Foxtail Millet	0	0	1.25	1.25	1.87	1.88	93.75
Little Millet	0	0	0	0	1.87	0.63	97.50
Kodo Millet	0	0	0	0	0	0	100
Proso Millet	0	0	0	0	0	0	100
Barnyard Millet	0	0	0	0	0	0	100
Browntop Millet	0	0	0	0	0	0	100

The association between profile characteristic variables and awareness on millets was shown in Table 5. A Pearson's chi-square test revealed that there was a significant association between millet consumption and awareness on millets at 5% level of significance. It inferred from the results that millet consumption has a relationship with school children's millet awareness. In rural areas, 53.13% of schoolchildren with an awareness of millets were found to have consumed millets, whereas only 3.12% of school children were aware but did not consume millets. Interestingly, schoolchildren who were unaware of millets were found to have consumed millets, whereas 15.00% of school children were unaware and did not consume the millets. In the urban area, a total of 41.25% of school children with an awareness of millets were found to have consumed millets, whereas only 5.63% of school

children were aware but did not consume millets. Interestingly, 29.37% of schoolchildren who were unaware of millets were found to consume millets. It could be due to the fact that the popularity of millet has declined over the years and it was either prepared by the parents or elders at home and often consumed by the school children. These results are consistent with Anitha *et al.* (2019) that only a few school children were consuming the millets; it was either consumed by their parents or other household adults. The other variables such as age, gender and education had no significant association with awareness on millets. It showed that regardless of age, gender, or level of education, schoolchildren were aware of millets. However, the lack of millet awareness among school children has limited their regular millet consumption.

Table 5: Chi-square analysis of profile characteristic variables according to the school children millet awareness.

Awareness on millets					
Variables	Rural (n=160) Frequency (%)		Urban (n=160) Frequency (%)		p-Value
	Yes	No	Yes	No	
Age (in years)					
12 -14	31 (19.37)	27 (16.88)	19 (11.88)	15 (9.38)	0.632
14- 16	52 (32.50)	40 (25.00)	53 (33.12)	66 (41.25)	
16 & above	07 (4.38)	03 (1.87)	03 (1.87)	04 (2.50)	
Gender					
Male	46 (28.75)	45 (28.12)	16 (10.00)	20 (12.50)	0.105
Female	44 (27.50)	25 (15.63)	59 (36.88)	65 (40.62)	
Education					
8 th grade	45 (28.13)	34 (21.25)	41 (25.62)	39 (24.38)	0.369
9 th grade	45 (28.12)	36 (22.50)	34 (21.25)	46 (28.75)	
Millet consumption					
Yes	85 (53.13)	46 (28.75)	66 (41.25)	47 (29.37)	0.001*
No	05 (3.12)	24 (15.00)	09 (5.63)	38 (23.75)	

*Significant at p< 0.05 level.

CONCLUSION

According to our knowledge, this is the first research study to analyze the awareness and consumption of millets among schoolchildren. The main aim of this study was to understand the factors contributing to millet awareness in both rural and urban school children. The results revealed that awareness on millets contributed in the millet consumption. The study suggested that millets should be actively promoted, and nutrition education on millets should be implemented to raise awareness among schoolchildren, thus, it may further help in millet consumption. It also brought into light that more research needs to be carried out in creating awareness among school children. The study suggests future research on millet nutrition education via various media channels, knowledge development on the significance of millets, and interventions to change people's attitudes toward millet consumption.

FUTURE SCOPE

The present study aimed to provide baseline data on millet awareness and consumption among school children. The results thus obtained will be helpful in planning campaigns or nutrition education to improve millet nutrition among the school the school children.

Also, it can be useful to policy makers, institutional reformers and researchers in formulating new millet nutrition programmes and interventions for school-aged children.

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Conflict of Interest. None.

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