

ATTITUDES AND AWARENESS OF THE FOOD ENVIRONMENT IN ADDRESSING THE BURDEN OF MALNUTRITION IN ADOLESCENT GIRLS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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BACKGROUND: Achieving the 2030 SDG goal of zero malnutrition remains challenging due to high malnutrition rates among vulnerable groups, especially adolescent girls. Addressing both distal and proximal environmental factors is crucial, emphasizing multisectoral engagement and leveraging their capacity for sustainable solutions. This study aims to explore attitudes and awareness of the food environment at home and school in preventing and controlling malnutrition among adolescent girls.

METHOD: This study used a descriptive qualitative method involving 28 informants from four schools in Majene Regency, West Sulawesi. The informants were principals, teachers, food vendors in school canteens, and mothers of students, all recommended by the principals of each school. Data were collected through semi structured interviews, focus group discussions, and documentation, then analyzed using thematic and narrative analysis.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION: Teachers, school principals, food vendors, and parents play active roles in promoting healthy eating among adolescent girls. School actors support cross-sector collaboration, implement health-related rules, and engage in nutrition education. Food vendors are committed to offering nutritious options while adapting to student preferences. Parents consistently guide and monitor their children's eating habits, though they face gaps between knowledge and practice. All actors recognize the influence of food choices on health, the challenges of social and cultural norms, and the importance of setting a personal example to drive positive change.

CONCLUSION: Teachers, school principals, food vendors, and parents demonstrate positive attitudes and awareness of their respective roles, despite facing social, cultural, and structural challenges. A shared awareness of the importance of setting a good example and initiating change from within serves as a crucial foundation for promoting healthier eating behaviors among adolescents. Promoting adolescent nutrition requires multisectoral collaboration, ongoing education, cultural sensitivity, and active engagement of schools, parents, and food vendors.

KEYWORDS: Attitude; Awareness; Food Environment; Adolescent Girls; Malnutrition