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Abstract

Evidence of Limited Iron Education Provided to 11–14-Year-Old Females in New Zealand Schools †

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Abstract: Iron deficiency is one of the most common nutritional deficiencies worldwide and is the leading cause of anaemia. Iron deficiency is disproportionately represented in the female population, partially due to the significant blood loss experienced during menstruation. Awareness of a female's increased risk and symptoms associated with iron deficiency may aid early diagnosis, and treatment. Additionally, increases in iron education may serve as a preventative method for reducing iron deficiency incidence in females in the general population. The objective of this study was to investigate the level of dietary iron education currently provided to 11–14-year-old females in intermediate and secondary schools in New Zealand. An anonymous online questionnaire was distributed to nutrition, physical education, and health teachers nationwide to gain their perspective of what iron (dietary and menstruation) education is provided within their schools. A total of 182 teachers were recruited via work email addresses and of these, 50 completed the questionnaire (response rate = 27%). The results reflect a low level of iron education currently being provided, with 52% (26/50) of participants reporting that iron education was not part of their current curricula. The delivery of iron education did appear to be affected by the subject the participant primarily taught (χ^2 =12.641, p = 0.002). Health and physical education teachers were 5.07 times more likely to report that they did not teach any iron-specific education compared to nutrition teachers. The primary reasons for not including iron education were a lack of time (36%, 9/26) followed by iron education being too specific (28%, 7/26). Our findings indicate that there is limited iron education provided to 11–14-year-old female students in intermediate and secondary schools in New Zealand. This low amount of iron education appears to be due to a lack of time available for teachers to cover the specific topic in the health and nutrition curricula.

Keywords: iron; iron deficiency; dietary iron; education; anaemia

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