Nutritional Knowledge: Are Undergraduates Smarter Than High School Coaches?

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Purpose: This study compared the nutritional knowledge of high school coaches to undergraduate college students.

Method: Nutritional knowledge was assessed by the Nutrition Knowledge Questionnaire (NKQ)1 The NKO meets psychometric criteria for reliability(Cronbach's alpha=.70-.97 and construct validity, P=.001). The NKO is divided into subscales of Dietary Recommendations (DR), Sources of Foods (SOF), Choosing Everyday Foods (CEF), Diet-Disease Relationships (DDR), and a Total Score (TS). The subscales were used as dependent variables. The independent variable was respondent status (high school coaches' versus undergraduate students'). The survey was administered to the students on the first day of class, prior to instruction. Coaches, who agreed to participate, were recruited from schools within 50 miles of the University.

Analysis/ Results: Subjects were 62 (M age=22.45 yrs.±4.78) students and 71 (M age =28.78yrs.±5.23) high school coaches. Data were analyzed using independent T-Tests for the variables (DR, SOF, CEF, DDR, and TS). Analyses found a significant ($p>.05$) mean difference between students (M=5.01±2.09) and coaches (M=6.15±2.59) ($t(131)=2.756$, $p=.007$) on the DDR subscale. No other significant differences were found. The results infer that high school coaches' nutritional knowledge surpasses that of undergraduate students in only one of the four areas of the sub-scale.

Conclusion: These results are a concern because research indicates adolescents are likely to seek nutritional advice from coaches (Douglas & Douglas, 1994; Dunn, Eddy, Wang, Nagy, Perko, & Bartee, 2001; Krowchuk, Agnlin, Goodfellow, Stancin, Williams, & Zinet, 1989; Scofield & Unrich, 2006). Additional research is needed to determine if high school coaches have sufficient nutritional knowledge.