



Nutritional Knowledge, Dietary Behaviours, Attitudes, And Body Composition in Elite First-Class Cricketers in Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACTS

Purpose	Nutrition knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours (NKAB) are important determinants of dietary habits and body composition (BC) in athletes. This study aimed to examine the associations between nutrition knowledge, dietary behaviours, attitudes, and body composition in professional first-class cricketers in Sri Lanka. This cross-sectional study examined associations between NKAB and BC among 43 of 45 domestically contracted male first-class cricketers in Sri Lanka.
Materials and Methods	NKAB was assessed using the validated Sri Lanka specific Sports Nutrition Knowledge Questionnaire (SLn-SNKQ). BC was measured via the sum of seven-site skinfolds. Descriptive statistics, Pearson's correlations, and regression analyses explored associations, with significance set at $p < 0.05$.
Result	Participants displayed moderate nutrition knowledge (mean 8.0 ± 6.1), but no significant associations emerged between NK, behaviours, attitudes, and BC ($p > 0.05$). Regression analysis showed NKAB collectively did not predict variance in BC ($R^2 = 0.06$, $p = 0.48$).
Conclusion	Higher NK was not associated with more favourable BC, highlighting the influence of contextual and cultural barriers on nutrition practice. The study provides the first dataset on NKAB and BC in Sri Lankan cricketers, emphasizing the need for tailored interventions addressing affordability, accessibility, and cultural norms to bridge the gap between knowledge and practice.
Keywords	Sports nutrition; Nutrition knowledge; Dietary behaviours; Body composition; Cricketer.

INTRODUCTION

Sports nutrition has evolved as one of the key determinants of athletic performance, recovery, and physiological outcomes. Optimal nutrition enhances body composition, reduces injury risk, and improves endurance, speed, and strength, while inadequate nutrition can impair these outcomes (Burke & Deakin, 2021; Thomas et al., 2016). Although cricket is often viewed as a low-intensity

sport, it involves intermittent high-intensity activities such as sprinting, bowling, batting, and fielding under hot and humid conditions, requiring athletes to maintain optimal body composition (Johnstone & Ford, 2010; Petersen et al., 2010). Optimal fat mass and higher lean muscle mass are strongly linked to superior performance and reduced injury risk (Mujika & Padilla, 2001). Nutritional knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours are key determinants of dietary practices and body composition and are conceptually explained through the Knowledge-Attitude-Behaviour (KAB) framework, which proposes that knowledge shapes attitudes and subsequently influences behaviours. However, this relationship is not always linear, as behavioural outcomes can be influenced by environmental, cultural, and socio-economic factors, making it important to examine nutrition knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours (NKAB) collectively.

Existing literature suggests that nutritional knowledge may improve dietary behaviours and body composition (Arnaoutis et al., 2024). However, findings remain inconsistent, with several studies reporting weak or non-significant relationships between nutrition knowledge, dietary practices, and physiological outcomes such as body composition (Spronk et al., 2014; Jagim et al., 2021). This inconsistency highlights a gap in understanding how knowledge translates into practice in real-world sporting environments. Sri Lankan athletes face cultural and socioeconomic challenges, including carbohydrate-heavy diets, low protein intake, and limited access to dietitians (Jayawardena et al., 2024; Rupasinghe et al., 2023). These contextual factors may disrupt the relationships proposed by the KAB framework, creating a disconnect between knowledge and practice. Despite the availability of validated tools for Sri Lankan athletes, no studies have examined NKAB and body composition among elite cricketers, representing a clear research gap in a population with unique performance and environmental demands.

Investigating NKAB in elite Sri Lankan cricketers is important due to its direct implications for athletic performance, recovery, and long-term health, highlighting the urgency of this research. The novelty of this study lies in being the first to apply a validated Sri Lanka-specific sports nutrition knowledge tool to elite cricketers while examining knowledge, attitudes, behaviours, and body composition within a single framework. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate the relationship between nutrition knowledge, dietary behaviours, attitudes, and body composition in professional first-class cricketers in Sri Lanka. The findings are expected to contribute to theory by strengthening understanding of the KAB framework in sport, and to practice and policy by informing nutrition education strategies and athlete support systems in Sri Lanka.

METHODS

Research Design

A cross-sectional, correlational study design was used to assess relationships between nutrition knowledge, attitudes, behaviours (NKAB), and body composition.

Study Participants

At the time of recruitment, forty-five male first-class cricketers were under domestic contracts with Sri Lanka Cricket. Forty-three players (age 22.3 ± 2.5 years) participated, representing 95.5 % of this population. Exclusion criteria included players not contracted by SLC, not actively participating at national or domestic level, or injured.

Data Collection

Anthropometric Measurements

Participants' body mass and height were measured prior to body composition assessment using a Harpenden calliper (HaB Direct, Warwickshire, UK) for the 7-site skinfolds protocol. Body mass was measured without shoes or T-shirt using a digital scale (Halter, model 9069BK3RCSAFFOB, UP Global Sourcing UK Ltd, Manchester, UK) with ± 0.01 kg precision. Height was measured using a stadiometer (SECA 213, Hamburg, Germany) with participants standing upright, head and back against the scale.

Body Composition

Body composition was measured using the male 7-site skinfolds sum (biceps, triceps, subscapular, suprailiac, abdomen, thigh, calf) taken on the right side of the body. Each skinfold was measured twice; if the difference exceeded 2 mm, a third measurement was taken. The average of two readings within 2 mm was recorded. All measurements were performed by an ISAK-certified anthropometrist who routinely conducts assessments for Sri Lanka Cricket's quarterly fitness evaluations. Standardized procedures and calibrated instruments ensured reliability. Measurements took place at the Sri Lanka Cricket High-Performance Centre.

Nutrition Knowledge, Attitudes, and Behaviours (NKAB)

Participants completed a questionnaire adapted from the validated Sri Lanka-specific Sports Nutrition Knowledge Questionnaire (SLN-SNKQ) (Jayawardena et al., 2024). The tool includes domains for nutrition knowledge (19 items), behaviours (5 items), and attitudes (3 items, Likert scale), including demographic information (age, playing role, experience) followed by questions evaluating the sports nutrition knowledge through multiple-choice questions and true/false questions covering macronutrients, hydration, meal timing, and supplementation. The dietary behaviour section included frequency-based questions assessing common eating and hydration practices before, during, and after training and competition while the attitude sections used the Likert-scale format to capture beliefs and perceptions regarding the importance of nutrition and its impact on performance. Scoring: correct = +1, incorrect = -1, unsure = 0. Higher scores indicated greater knowledge or more positive behaviours/attitudes. The adapted version was piloted among domestic cricketers ($n = 5$) to ensure clarity and relevance. Internal consistency was acceptable (Cronbach's $\alpha > 0.70$).

Statistical Analysis

All analyses were performed using SPSS v26 (IBM Corp., Armonk, NY, USA). Descriptive statistics (mean \pm SD, range) summarized participant characteristics and NKAB scores. Normality was tested using Shapiro-Wilk and Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests. Normally distributed variables were analyzed using Pearson's correlation; non-normal data used Spearman's rank-order correlation. Multiple linear regression determined the predictive value of NKAB on body composition (sum of seven skinfolds). Significance was set at $p < 0.05$.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for this study was granted by the Ethics Committee of Setanta College, Ireland (ECSET 034/20251). Informed consent was obtained prior to data collection.

RESULT

All 43 participants were included in the analysis (95.5 % of contracted cricketers). Mean height = 175.3 ± 5.7 cm; mean body mass = 72.3 ± 8.7 kg; sum of seven skinfolds = 65.5 ± 18.2 mm (range 30.2 - 129.0 mm), showing substantial variation in adiposity.

Table 1. Participant characteristics (n = 43)

Variable	Range	Mean	SD
Height (cm)	1.62 - 1.88	1.75	0.06
Weight (kg)	51.5 - 91.4	72.3	8.68
Biceps (mm)	2.0 - 11.3	3.97	1.84
Triceps (mm)	2.4 - 14.4	8.75	2.80
Subscapular (mm)	6.6 - 19.6	11.19	3.13
Supraspinale (mm)	3.4 - 29.0	9.84	4.58
Abdomen (mm)	5.0 - 37.8	15.27	6.43
Thigh (mm)	4.8 - 18.4	9.46	3.08
Calf (mm)	3.2 - 13.4	7.06	2.57
Sum of 7 (mm)	30.2 - 129.0	65.53	18.20

Note: Body composition assessed per ISAK standards using Harpenden callipers.

Questionnaire Outcomes

Nutrition knowledge scores ranged from -3 to 19 (mean 8.0 ± 6.1); behaviour scores 2.3 ± 1.8 (range -1 to 5); attitude scores 2.3 ± 1.0 (range -1 to 3). Overall, participants showed moderate knowledge with varied behaviours and attitudes.

Normality testing showed BC ($p = 0.22$) and NK ($p = 0.21$) were normally distributed, but behaviour ($p = 0.006$) and attitude ($p < 0.001$) were not.

Correlation Analysis

No significant association was found between nutrition knowledge and body composition ($r = 0.02$, $p = 0.88$). A moderate positive correlation was observed between knowledge and attitudes ($\rho = 0.42$, $p = 0.006$). Behaviours were not correlated with knowledge ($\rho = 0.16$, $p = 0.32$) nor with body composition ($\rho = 0.07$, $p = 0.68$).

Table 2. Correlation analysis summary

Variables	Sum 7	NK Total	Behaviour Total	Attitude Total
Sum 7	-	0.024	0.065	-0.080
NK Total		-	0.155	0.415**
Behaviour Total			-	0.193
Attitude Total				-

Note: Pearson's r and Spearman's ρ used; $p < 0.05$ (**).

Regression Analysis

Multiple linear regression with body composition as the dependent variable and NKAB as independent variables showed the model explained 6.1 % of variance ($R^2 = 0.06$, $p = 0.48$). None of the predictors were significant:

- Knowledge ($B = 0.32$, $p = 0.53$)
- Behaviour ($B = 1.08$, $p = 0.50$)
- Attitude ($B = -4.54$, $p = 0.15$)

DISCUSSION

This study provides a near-census of Sri Lanka's contracted first-class cricketers in 2025, offering the first population-level insight into their nutrition knowledge, attitudes, behaviours, and body composition profiles. The findings revealed no significant associations between nutritional knowledge, behaviours, attitudes, and body composition in elite Sri Lankan cricketers. Although the athletes demonstrated moderate levels of nutrition knowledge, this did not correspond with favourable body composition or improved dietary habits. This finding does not support the initial hypothesis that higher nutrition knowledge would translate into improved behaviours and body composition, suggesting that knowledge alone may be insufficient to influence physiological outcomes.

This gap between knowledge and measurable outcomes has been documented in multiple athletic populations, reinforcing that awareness alone is insufficient to modify dietary behaviour and physiological status (Heaney et al., 2011; Spronk et al., 2015). From a theoretical perspective, this can be interpreted using the Knowledge-Attitude-Behaviour (KAB) framework, where knowledge may positively influence attitudes but does not necessarily lead to behavioural change without enabling environmental and structural support. The positive correlation between knowledge and attitudes suggests that athletes with higher knowledge tend to value nutrition more highly, consistent with the KAB model (Teo et al., 2022). However, the absence of a link between attitudes and behaviours indicates that belief alone does not ensure application. Importantly, the non-significant findings should be interpreted with caution, as the relatively small sample size and limited variability may have reduced statistical power. Furthermore, the cross-sectional design restricts causal inference, and therefore, the findings should be considered associative rather than causal. For team-based sports such as cricket, nutrition choices are shaped not only by personal understanding but also by cultural norms, affordability, food availability, and team environments. Comparable studies in South Asia report that although athletes recognise the importance of proper nutrition, actual practice remains constrained by economic and cultural limitations, particularly high reliance on rice-based diets and limited access to protein-rich foods (Bakhtiar et al., 2021; Thapa et al., 2023; Rupasinghe et al., 2023). In the Sri Lankan cricket context, additional barriers such as limited access to sports dietitians, inconsistent dietary provision during travel, and lack of structured nutrition monitoring may further explain the absence of significant associations. Regression analysis indicated that NKAB explained only 6 % of variance in body composition, implying other determinants genetic, physiological, or environmental have greater influence. Research shows that sleep quality, injury history, and workload management may independently affect body composition regardless of diet (Jagim et al., 2021). Socio-economic constraints are another key barrier. Even when athletes gain knowledge through education, affordability and availability of nutrient-rich foods limit implementation (Jayawardena et al., 2024).

For travelling cricketers who often depend on team-provided meals, consistency in quality and portion control can be difficult to achieve. Therefore, practical, culturally tailored interventions such as incorporating affordable protein sources (eggs, pulses, small fish) and local recovery foods are necessary. However, these implications should be interpreted cautiously, as the cross-sectional nature of the study does not allow for causal conclusions. To improve outcomes, sports nutrition education in Sri Lanka should move beyond theoretical instruction. Evidence from volleyball and handball interventions demonstrates that behaviour-based education, combined with performance monitoring, leads to improvements in both diet and athletic performance (Palani et al., 2024;

Arnaoutis et al., 2024). Similar, low-cost programmes integrated into cricket academies could address existing barriers.

Future research should adopt longitudinal or intervention-based designs to better establish causal relationships, include larger and more diverse samples, and further explore contextual determinants such as socio-economic status, cultural influences, and food environments to provide a more comprehensive understanding of nutrition behaviours among Sri Lankan athletes

CONCLUSION

Elite first-class Sri Lankan cricketers demonstrated moderate nutrition knowledge that did not translate into favourable body composition outcomes. The findings underscore the complex interaction between cultural, socio-economic, and structural factors that influence dietary behaviour. To bridge the gap between knowledge and practice, Sri Lankan cricket should adopt practical, context-appropriate nutrition interventions that integrate education with behavioural and environmental support.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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