EP045

WHICH HEALTH BEHAVIOURS ARE HARDER TO ACHIEVE? INSIGHTS FROM TUNAS DOKTOR MUDA PROGRAMME



MINISTRY OF HEALTH MALAYSIA
INSTITUTE FOR HEALTH BEHAVIOURAL RESEARCH

Nor Faizadatul Ain binti Ab Wahid[1]*, Mohd Razif bin Zakaria[1]

[1]Health Education Division, Ministry of Health Malaysia
*faizadatul@moh.gov.my
*mohdrazif@moh.gov.my

Introduction

Tunas Doktor Muda (TDM) is a health promotion initiative implemented in selected preschools and kindergartens across Malaysia to cultivate healthy behaviours among children aged five to six years. Early childhood is a critical period for the development of health behaviours. Studies have shown that school-based health education programmes are effective in improving basic hygiene practices among preschool children (Khan et al., 2021).

Health behaviours in the Tunas Doktor Muda Programme are assessed based on established guidelines across three levels, namely Tahap Penguasaan 1 (TP1) to Tahap Penguasaan 3 (TP3). Each child is assessed at the end of the year following one year of programme implementation. Behaviour achievement data are analysed at different levels, including district, state and national levels, to determine which health behaviours have achieved the target of at least 80% of children attaining TP3 status.

Health behaviours such as handwashing and tooth brushing are reinforced through routine and repetition, making them easier to develop among young children. As these practices are embedded in daily routines and consistently guided by adults, children are able to form habits through repeated exposure and imitation. However, more complex behaviours, such as healthy eating practices, remain challenging to achieve due to factors such as taste preference, limited cognitive development and environmental influences (Bánfai-Csonka et al., 2022).

Objectives

This analysis aims to:

1. Evaluate key health behaviours through structured health education activities to monitor children's acquisition of basic health practices.
2. Examine the achievement patterns of selected health behaviours among participating children using programme monitoring data over a three-year period.

Methodology

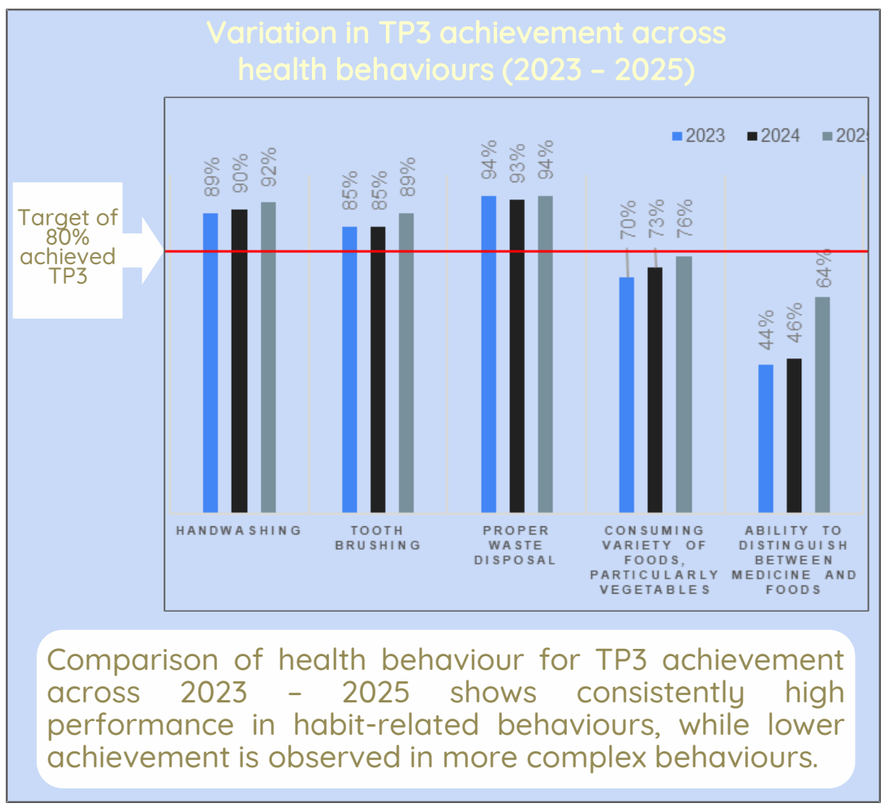
2023
2024
2025

Programme monitoring secondary data were analysed.

Target: 80% of participating children achieving Tahap Penguasaan 3 (TP3) status in at least five out of seven health behaviours.

A descriptive analysis was conducted to identify trends and variations in behaviour achievement across 3-year period.

Results



Comparison of health behaviour for TP3 achievement across 2023 – 2025 shows consistently high performance in habit-related behaviours, while lower achievement is observed in more complex behaviours.



Discussion and Conclusion

The behaviour achievement patterns observed in this analysis highlight a clear distinction between behaviours that are habit-driven and those that require higher levels of understanding and decision-making. High achievement in handwashing, tooth brushing and proper waste disposal supports previous evidence that **routine-based practices are more easily adopted due to repeated reinforcement in both school and home environments** (Khan et al., 2021). This may also be attributed to continuous reinforcement, structured environments and modelling by adults, which facilitate the development of key health behaviours at an early age (Bánfai-Csonka et al., 2022).

In contrast, behaviours with lower achievement, such as vegetable consumption and the ability to distinguish between medicine and food, reflect the challenges highlighted in previous literature. Dietary behaviours are often influenced by children's taste preferences and home environment, making them more difficult to modify through school-based interventions alone (UNICEF, 2019). Similarly, the ability to differentiate between medicine and food requires a **higher level of cognitive understanding and health literacy, which may still be developing among children aged five to six years** (Bánfai-Csonka et al., 2022).

These findings suggest that while existing programmes are effective in promoting basic health practices, behaviours that involve decision-making and understanding require more interactive, context-based and family-oriented strategies. The variation in behaviour achievement in the Tunas Doktor Muda Programme highlights the importance of **strengthening current interventions by integrating cognitive, environmental and family-based approaches** to ensure sustainable health behaviour development among young children (WHO, 2020; Bánfai-Csonka et al., 2022).

Acknowledgement

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