

**STUDY OF CONSUMPTION, BEHAVIOUR
AND AWARENESS OF FAST FOOD
AMONG URBAN STUDENTS OF LATE
ADOLESCENT AGE GROUP WITH
REFERENCE TO BMI, ACTIVITY PROFILE
AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS**

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INTRODUCTION

In both developed and developing nations, there has been a significant surge in the promotion of foods rich in fat, sugar, and salt, with a considerable focus on targeting adolescents. Consequently, there has been a rapid and concerning rise in the prevalence of childhood obesity. As concerns about this emerging pandemic intensify, efforts to modify consumer behavior are also gaining attention. Adolescents, being less capable than adults in comprehending persuasive advertising techniques, are particularly susceptible to television food advertisements. National and international regulations and guidelines aim to prevent the exploitation of children's vulnerability and protect them from aggressive marketing tactics. Many countries have implemented restrictions on the marketing of tobacco and alcohol concerning children. However, despite its impact on child health and nutrition, fast food advertising has received limited regulatory attention. Before devising intervention strategies, it is crucial to comprehend the factors influencing consumer behavior and the connection between consumption, awareness, and behavior.

Adolescents worldwide are consuming calorie-rich foods, but these choices do not necessarily reflect a healthier dietary pattern. The consumption of fast food has significantly risen in recent decades [1] resulting in reduced diet quality and additional caloric intake. This has implications for both immediate and long-term health outcomes and is thought to be one of many interrelated factors linked to increased body mass index (BMI) and rates of obesity in young people [2]. Foods eaten out-of-home by adolescents is typically consumed in school and peer contexts, and adolescent reports confirm that lunches and snacks are often eaten with friends [3].

RATIONALE

As urbanization and industrialization speed up in Gujarat, the fast-food market expanded dramatically. However, with the introduction of Western culture, fast food and continental cuisines were also gaining popularity. This study was carried out in Surat, Gujarat. The cultural

background of Gujarat makes the food habits predominantly enriched in high calories content including fats, carbohydrates and proteins leading to pre-exposure of the individuals/populations to lifestyle diseases. Fast food was a very fast-growing industry in India as well as in Gujarat especially in urban areas (small and large cities). However, not much research literature was available on fast food preferences of consumers, especially young consumers in Gujarat. This article was based on an exploratory study that fills that gap in literature in the context of Gujarat. Since such study has not been carried out in Surat, Gujarat; so, the target population was urban students of adolescents age group (15-19 years).

RESEARCH QUESTION

1. What were the associations between the consumption, behaviour, and awareness of Fast Food in late adolescent group?
2. What were the effects on the BMI and activity profile of the late adolescent group?
3. How was socio-economic status associated with consumption, behaviour, and awareness of Fast Food in late adolescent group of urban students?

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the impact of fast-food consumption on the Body Mass Index (BMI) of adolescents.
2. To establish the correlation between fast-food consumption and the behavior of urban students regarding their lifestyle.
3. To assess the level of awareness among urban students and its influence on their behavior towards the consumption of fast food.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employed a descriptive cross-sectional design and focused on the Surat city of Gujarat, targeting school and college students in grades 10th to 12th and first and second years. The sample size of 350 students was determined through purposive random

sampling within various academic institutions. Data were collected using a qualitative questionnaire featuring closed-ended items, designed for students aged 15-19 years. A self-developed, pretested semi-structured questionnaire was utilized for a questionnaire-based survey. The participants, comprising Indian national boys and girls attending schools and colleges in Surat, were briefed about the study's nature, and consenting students completed the questionnaire during class sessions. The data collected from the 350 students were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) program Version 16, employing cross-tabulation for data analysis. The inclusion criterion for student selection was an age range of 15-19 years, ensuring a focused and relevant study population.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The study involved 350 respondents in Surat city, categorizing them into school-going students aged 15-17 years (58%) and college-going students aged 18-19 years (42%). More male participants (63%) than females (37%) were included. The research revealed widespread malnutrition, with over 50% of respondents falling into unhealthy weight categories. Analysis by gender indicated more underweight girls and a higher prevalence of overweight and obesity among boys. Socio-economic status also influenced health, with higher percentages of underweight respondents in lower income brackets. While 69% of respondents stayed with parents, 57% did not eat healthy food even at home. Fast food consumption was prevalent, influenced by taste, mood, and advertisements. Most respondents engaged in minimal physical activity, contributing to weight-related health issues. Despite awareness of fast food's harmful effects, its consumption remained high. The study suggested interventions such as promoting healthier food options and educating students to reduce fast food consumption.

CONCLUSION

Fast food has become a prominent element in diets, experiencing a significant surge in consumption since the early 1970s. Adolescents exhibited a high frequency of fast-food visits, averaging three times per week. Various factors contributed to this rise, including increased employment among women, dual-career households, diverse family schedules, an aging population, and a growing number of smaller households. The appeal of fast food lies in its quick availability, reasonable pricing, and convenience. Responding to health concerns, fast-food restaurants are adapting practices like using vegetable oils instead of animal fats, introducing low-fat menu items, and offering more fruits and vegetables at salad bars. This study reveals a prevalence of overweight and underweight conditions surpassing normal weight and obesity among adolescents, indicating inadequate dietary intake. Those consuming fast food tend to have higher intake of calories, fat, sugar, and sugar-sweetened beverages, while having lower intake of fiber, milk, fruit, and vegetables compared to their peers who avoid fast food. Regular consumption of fast food among adolescents poses health risks, contributing to energy-dense diets and increasing the likelihood of obesity. The study underscores three significant factors contributing to potential health issues in later stages among adolescents with heavy fast-food consumption.

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