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Frequency and Attitudes to Fast Food Consumption in Yasuj, Southwestern Iran

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ABSTRACT

Background: Nowadays, fast food consumption has increased dramatically in different societies leading to many diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, hypertension and other chronic diseases. This study aimed to investigate the frequency and attitude toward consumption of fast foods.

Methods: Totally, 540 subjects aged 18-45 years old from Yasuj, southwestern Iran who referred to health centers were randomly enrolled. A questionnaire was used to collect demographic information and the attitude toward fast food consumption.

Results: Totally, 304 (56.3%) male and 236 (43.7%) female were included. The consumption of fast food was 3 times per week among 23.5% of participants, 1-2 times per week in 45.6% of people, less than once a week in 28.4% of subjects and 2.2% never had fast food experience. 79.7% of consumers cited good taste as the main reason for consumption, 59.6% and 14.4% of them reported fast preparation and advertisement, respectively. Students and singles ate fast food more than others, 84.7% of fast food consumers used carbonated beverages with their fast food and 63.7% of them had fast foods as dinner.

Conclusion: Fast food consumption has been extremely high and particularly more among students and youths in Yasuj that can be an alarm for health providers. Therefore, providing the necessary education and training can promote awareness for the side effects of fast food consumption in the society.

Introduction

Undoubtedly, nutritional status is one of the effective factors on establishing health for human life. Nowadays, lifestyle has undergone dramatic changes since the advances in science

and technology leading to replacement of our main foods with the fast foods (1). Fast foods are not usually home cooked meals, but are prepared quickly including sandwiches, burgers, pizzas, falafels, sambosas, French fries, sausages, hot dogs,

non-homemade canned foods and fried chickens (2, 3). Several studies showed that the calorie intake, saturated fats, sodium and carbohydrates are higher among people who eat fast foods, while dietary fibers, B-group vitamins, consumption of milk, fruits and vegetables are lower (4-6).

Therefore, fast food consumption was demonstrated to endanger health because of high energy and fat intake, especially for saturated and trans fats and less for other nutrients (2, 3). The imbalance between food intake and the energy consumption of high calorie and fat foods, the lack of adequate mobility would result into an increase in possibility of obesity and the risk of developing different diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, osteoporosis, etc (2, 5-7). Since fat, additives, too much salt are used for making delicious foods to increase the desire of people for fast food consumption, they may increase the incidence of myocardial infarction and stroke too (5, 8, 9) and cause complications, such as nervous system disorders, headaches, skin problems, itching, disorders of the respiratory system, cough, asthma, and digestive problems (9).

It was shown that 90.8% of the population in Yazd city, Iran consumed fast foods (1). In a study conducted in the United States, 37% of adults and 42% of children used fast foods per day (5). In another study conducted on American students, fast food was used as lunch in 84% of men and 58 percent of women for at least once a week, which was higher in men (10). Moore *et al.* studied the reasons of fast food consumption, while 92%, 80%, 69% of the subjects cited the reason as its fast preparation, easily available and to be delicious (11). In a study conducted on high school students in Isfahan city, Iran, 7.5% of students had never consumed fast food, 22.5% of them per several months, 26.3% per month, 26.9% of them once every two weeks, 12.5% once or twice a week and 2.7% three times or more in a week and only 50% of students were aware of the fast food complications (12).

The amount of peroxides in oil consumption of restaurants and sandwich shops previously evaluated in Yasuj city, Iran denoted to at least 70% of sandwich shops to have a poor health status and non-compliance with standards for oils consumption, which may also contain toxic substances and threaten the consumers' health (13). Based on health importance and the advancement of technology and cultural changes, fast food consumption was shown to provide changes in today's life style in the societies and an inappropriate effects on people's health. So we decided to study the status and reasons for fast food consumption in Yasuj, Iran in order to

provide a basis for an epidemiological study to focus on better interventions that can promote health status in the society.

Materials and Methods

In this study, stratified sampling method was used with the required sample size of 540, from first health care centers referrals divided into strata and homogeneous groups (We considered 600 samples to cover the missing participants from the study). The participants were randomly selected among households referring to health centers and were covered by Health Care Services. The required information were provided from the people aged 18-45 years. By referring to each participant house, they were asked if they could contribute in the study. If nobody was at home, another subject was enrolled.

The required information was obtained by self-administered questionnaire that its validity and reliability were determined by previous studies included demographic questions, the state and reasons of fast food consumption. The interviewers were fully informed about their jobs and the correct completion of questionnaire during several sessions before referring to the participants' houses to obtain information by considering qualification required for each sample. They first clearly defined the fast food item for each subject before completing the questionnaire. In the questionnaire, the reasons for fast food consumption were requested openly, and were then categorized as various sets of reasons. The provided data were then analyzed using SPSS software (Version 12, Chicago, IL, USA) and T tests. A *p* value less than 0.05 was considered statistically significant.

Results

Totally, 540 people aged 18-45 years old from Yasuj city including 56.3% men and 47.7% women were enrolled. About 2.2% of participants never reported fast food consumption, while 5.37% of them had eaten fast food every day. The state and reasons for fast food intake were described in Table 1 showing that 79.7% of people stated the delicious taste of fast food as the main cause of consumption.

It is interesting to note that 19.3% and 59.6% of people expressed their family culture desire and quick preparation of these foods as the main reasons for fast food consumption, respectively. About 16.7% of fast food consumers considered it as an economical food and described it as one of the main reasons for fast food consumption. Another important point in the present study was that 14.4% of fast food consumers reported one of the main reasons of fast food consumption as

to be attractive and stimulating when advertised on television and on video advertising (Table 2). The state of fast food consumption among men and women was demonstrated in Table 3 and among different age groups was categorized in Table 4 demonstrating that 44.8 % of people ate fast food every day who were from the students group.

Burgers were taken more than other fast foods among people that 18.9% of them had eaten 3 times a week, while 14.8% reported sandwich consumption that was categorized in the next category. Totally, 76.1% of people consumed beer, among them 4.4% of them used every day, 31.5% weekly and 46.1% monthly and yearly. Totally 82.1% of participants drank sodas, among them 3.9% consumed sodas every day, 24.4% weekly, and 47.6% monthly and yearly. About 42% of consumers were unaware of the complications from fast food consumption and 27% of consumers did not know the main components of fast-food they ate. Totally, 35.4% of fast food consumers ate it as lunch, 63.7% as dinner

and 0.94% as breakfast. About 93.2% of fast food consumers (492 people) used sauces with their fast foods, 5.3% of them ate salad with their fast foods and 95.1% (502 subjects) of fast food consumers used various drinks while having fast food that 84.7% (426 participants) of them often reported drinking carbonated beverages.

Discussion

Nowadays, fast food consumption has dramatically increased in different societies providing many problems such as heart disease, diabetes, hypertension and other chronic diseases. In our study, 23.5% of subjects had consumed fast foods 3 times a week, while in a study conducted before, 23% of people reported eating fast foods 3 times per week (14). In another study, 30.8% of people had fast foods more than 3 times a week, that clearly denoting to high consumption of fast foods similar to our findings (13).

Another study also showed the high rate of fast

Table 1: The state of fast food consumption in people aged 18-45 years old in Yasuj, Iran (n=540).

State of consumption	Number	Percentage
Never	12	2.20
Usually	46	8.50
Once per month	44	8.14
Twice per month	64	11.80
Once a week	91	16.80
Twice a week	156	28.80
3-6 times per week	98	18.14
Once a day	27	5
More than once a day	2	0.37

Table 2: Study the frequency of fast food consumption among subjects aged 18-45 years old in Yasuj, Iran (n=528).

Reason of consumption	Number	Percentage
The desire of family members	102	19.3
Busy people	98	18.6
Low cost of fast foods	88	16.7
Fast preparation	315	59.6
Good taste of fast food	421	7.7
Easy preparation	175	33.1
Advertisement	76	14.4
Others	19	3.6

Table 3: The state of fast food consumption among subjects aged 18-45 years old in Yasuj, Iran based on gender (n=540).

	Never	Usually	Once a month	Twice a month	Once a week	Twice a week	3-6 times a week	Once a day	More than once a week
Men	33.3%	60.8%	61.4%	59.4%	59.3%	57.1%	53.1%	48.1%	-
	4	28	27	38	54	89	52	13	
Women	66.6%	39.2%	38.6%	40.6%	40.6%	42.9%	46.9%	51.8%	100%
	8	18	17	26	37	67	46	14	2
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
	12	46	44	64	91	156	98	27	2

Table 4: The state of fast food consumption in people aged 18-45 years old in Yasuj, Iran based on age (n=540).

Total	More than once a week	Once a day	3-6 times a week	Twice a week	Once a week	Twice a month	Once a month	Usually	Never	
240	2	22	62	94	35	15	5	1	4	1/-25
100%	0.83%	9.2%	25.8%	39.2%	14.6%	6.25%	2.8%	0.46%	1.7%	
140	-	3	23	45	32	19	9	6	3	26-30
100%	-	2.1%	16.4%	32.1%	22.8%	13.6%	6.4%	4.3%	2.1%	
60	-	1	11	8	10	11	10	7	2	3135-
100%	-	1.7%	18.3%	13.3%	16.7%	18.3%	16.7%	11.7%	3.3%	
50	-	-	1	5	6	10	10	16	2	3640-
100%	-	-	2%	10%	12%	20%	20%	32%	4%	
50	-	1	1	5	8	9	10	16	1	4045-
100%	-	2%	2%	10%	16%	18%	20%	32%	2%	

food consumption presenting the same statistical figures like our study (12). In the present study, only 2.2% of participants reported never to consume fast foods, which was different from other studies showing that more people reporting to never use fast food when compared to our study (1, 12, 15). In different studies and the present research, it was shown that most people were aware of the harmful effects of fast foods, so they did not have it, describing the low percentage of people's awareness of the harmful effects of fast foods. In the present study, fast food consumption at age group of 18-25 years old was more than other groups, while the study conducted previously found that younger people were more likely to eat fast foods than older ones (12).

In a study conducted in Yazd, Iran, it was clearly proved that fast food consumption at age group of 18-25 years old was more than other groups identical to our study (1). In study undertaken before, young people reported having fast foods more than any other age group (15). This study showed that single people were more likely to eat fast food than married couples. It was previously verified that single and young people spent little time on cooking and preparing traditional foods that can explain consuming fast foods by these groups (1). Students group ate fast foods more than the other groups that may be due to their limitation of time for cooking (1). Different studies also indicated that students consumed fast food more than 2 times a week the same as our finding (16, 17).

It was demonstrated that students had fast foods for various reasons, such as socializing with friends, better taste, easy preparation, an opportunity to go out and lack of cooking skills that can describe our figure too (1). In the present study in contrary to most of the results of various studies, women ate fast foods more than men (1, 14-16). These differences in comparison with other studies can be attributed to the different cultures and taste of women in this study. In this study, the highest reason of fast food

consumption (79.7%) was its good flavor and taste that was the most common cause of fast food intake among consumers. In a study conducted before, it was shown that good flavor and taste (69%) were the main reasons for fast food consumption among consumers. In the present study, the desire of households, to be busy, quick preparation of fast foods were reported as the main reasons of fast food consumption (14).

In other studies, factors such as quick preparation, to be easily available, to be fun when consuming, the family culture desire for fast foods and a way to communicate with friends and family socially were the reasons reported for fast food consumption among consumers (14-20). But one of the most significant points of this study was the role of the media and television to provide an important reason for fast food consumption showing that 14.4% of fast food consumers had mentioned them as the main reasons of fast food consumption showing the crucial role of television and media for training and creating the right pattern of lifestyle of households. More studies should be done comparatively to assess the degree of threat of the media for each type independently to help preventing the habits of unhealthy lifestyles while television and other media can play the role as a double sword.

In the present study, 16.7% of participants stated fast and easy preparation of fast foods as the reasons of fast food consumption and also its low cost in comparison with other foods. Fast food consumption has been extremely high and particularly more among students and youths in Yasuj that can be an alarm for health providers. Therefore, providing the necessary education and training can promote awareness for the side effects of fast food consumption in the society.

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Conflict of Interest

None declared.

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