

Measuring Community Awareness About the Nutritional Facts in Fast Food

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Introduction

According to the World Health Organization, the prevalence of obesity in the UAE in 2016 was 34.5% and 70.6% were overweight. This could be due to unhealthy eating habits.

The traditional Arabian diet has changed from high fiber and low in fat, to a Western diet that is a high in fat, free sugars, sodium and cholesterol.

The aim of this study is to measure the knowledge of nutritional information of fast food among adults in UAE and investigate what factors affect the community's nutritional knowledge and how this knowledge affects people's dietary choices and their practices of buying fast food.

Methods

A cross-sectional study was conducted. A convenient sample of 480 of UAE citizens aged 18 and above from Sharjah and Ajman participated in this study. The least amount of questionnaire we needed to conduct the study with a sampling error of 5% was 385 questionnaires.

To account for any unexpected error or missing questionnaires we added 95 more making the total number of questionnaires 480 questionnaires.

A self-administered (or interview) questionnaire of 16 questions was used. The questions were categorized into 3 sections, which are demographics, knowledge, and attitudes & practices.

Data were entered and analyzed using SPSS 25. Percentages were used for demographic data and source of knowledge. Mean scores were used to assess Knowledge of calories and diseases associated with fast food.

Kruskal-Wallis test was used for knowledge score for harms and diseases associated with fast food consumption.

A p-value of 0.05 was considered as significant. Bar and pie charts were used to compare and demonstrate results of the study.

Results

A total of 480 questionnaires were correctly filled making the response rate 100%.

44.7% of the sample were males (n=214); 50.2% were 18-25 years old (n=241); 34.5% had high school certificate as highest educational level achieved (n=165); and 39.8% were current students (n=191), (figure 1).

The mean score of the knowledge of fast-food calories was 44.2% (Figure 2).

The mean score of the knowledge of diseases and harms associated with fast food consumption was 53.5% (Figure 3).

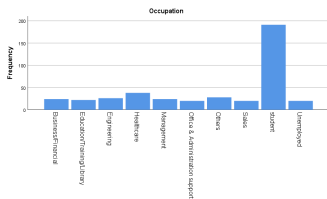


Figure 1: showing the frequency of each occupation among study participants.

Caloric Content

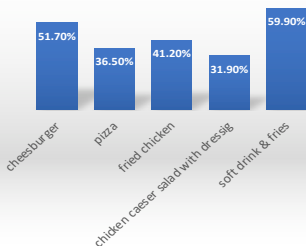


Figure 2: showing the percentage of subjects who identified the caloric content of each food.

Identified Diseases and Harms

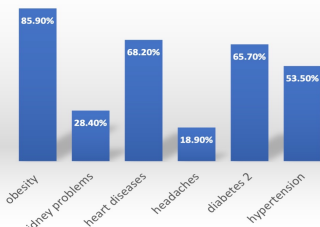


Figure 3: showing the percentage of subjects correctly identifying each disease because of fast-food consumption.

Discussion

Although the residents of the UAE seemed to have positive attitudes towards nutritional labels for fast food, their knowledge was comparably lacking and should be improved to increase the awareness regarding the importance of nutritional labeling. This can be achieved using social media and awareness programs in schools to educate the younger population.

Our results show that few percentages of the participants were able to link fast-food consumption to headaches and kidney diseases. Therefore, the public needs to be educated about various diseases and harms that can be caused by the consumption of fast foods, other than the commonly known ones such as heart disease, diabetes, and obesity.

Nutritional labels should be applied in restaurants in general, as well as in schools and workplace cafeterias. Lack of time can affect the dietary choices, so lunch breaks for students and workers should be elongated to help them make more health-conscious decisions. The practices regarding the use of the nutritional label were lower than expected, so this requires finding new creative ways to increase the use of those labels, such as making them colorful or adding a promotion code next to them to attract attention.

Conclusion

The UAE population has inadequate knowledge about the nutritional and caloric information of fast food. People over 35 years old have better knowledge about the diseases associated with the consumption of fast food. Low percentage of the UAE population look at nutritional labels. The population showed a positive attitude towards the implementation of nutritional labels in fast food restaurants.