

Awareness on Dietary Fats among Consumers and the Levels of Total Fat in Selected Foods; in Relation to Proposed Nutrition Labelling in Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT— Excessive consumption of dietary fats is one of the principal causes of the prevailing problem of noncommunicable diseases in Sri Lanka. With the intention of combats against the rising levels of noncommunicable diseases, Ministry of Health, Sri Lanka have proposed regulations, for mandatory food labelling and traffic light labeling on processed foods. The effectiveness on nutrition profile labelling is greatly determining by the awareness and attitudes on dietary fats among consumers, and the levels of total fats present in foods available in Sri Lanka. Therefore, a cross sectional study was conducted with 413 shoppers, lives in Colombo district, Sri Lanka. Self-administrated questionnaire was used to assess the consumers' postures on dietary fats. Total fats of seventy four most popular food products were also determined, under seven categories as; fast foods, bakery products, spreadable fats, biscuits, snacks, Sri Lankan sweetmeats and chocolates. According to the findings, respondents have a good basic knowledge of dietary fat-disease relationship. Nevertheless their awareness on different types and terms related with dietary fats were low. Even though the majority were food label users, the use of information on food labels such as; ingredient list, nutrition information and serving size were substantially poor. Therefore to gain the intended outcome of the proposed regulation, consumers need to be educated about dietary fats and use of food labels. According to the total fat analysis, 47 food products out of 74 were segmented under red category, suggesting the need of active regulations to limit the fat present in processed foods available in Sri Lanka. As well as total fat, saturated fat present in food play a significant role in human health and proposed nutrition profile labeling. Hence further studies are needed to assess the amount of saturated fat present in processed foods available in Sri Lanka.

Keywords— Dietary fats, Noncommunicable diseases, Traffic light labelling, Processed foods

1. INTRODUCTION

There is indubitable evidence that high dietary fat intake by Sri Lankans is related with the rising levels of noncommunicable diseases, which is a leading cause of deaths in Sri Lanka [1]. The Ministry of Health has shown that around 600 individuals succumb to noncommunicable diseases each day in Sri Lanka [2]. Also the proportion of deaths due to circulatory diseases (such as heart disease and stroke) has increased from 3 percent to 40 percent during past half century in Sri Lanka. As well, mortality rates from noncommunicable diseases are currently 20 to 50 percent higher in Sri Lanka than in developed countries [3]. According to the report of World Health Organization's non communicable diseases country profiles 2014, noncommunicable diseases are estimated to account for 75% of total deaths in Sri Lanka [4].

Therefore as an effort to combats against the prevailing problem of noncommunicable diseases, Ministry of Health, Sri Lanka has proposed different strategies for mandatory food labeling and traffic light labelling system for dietary fat, especially on processed foods available in Sri Lanka [1]. Nevertheless the intended outcome of these proposed strategies are greatly determining by the awareness and attitudes towards dietary fats and nutritional labelling among Sri Lankan consumers and the levels of total fat present in processed foods available in Sri Lanka. As reported by many printed versions [5, 6] the hidden fat in processed foods play a major role in this problem of rising levels of noncommunicable diseases. Therefore the purpose of this study was to provide estimates of awareness and attitude towards dietary fats and nutrition labelling among Sri Lankans and to examine the levels of total fat in selected processed foods in Sri Lanka.