

EXPLORING TRENDS AND DRIVERS OF HEALTHY FOOD HABITS AMONG YOUTH IN KERALA

Dr. Shaniba MH

Assistant Professor

Department of Economics, Al Ameen College, Edathala ,Aluva

Affiliated to MG University Kottayam

Abstract

The dietary habits of youth play a crucial role in shaping their overall health and wellbeing. Kerala, a state in India, has witnessed significant changes in food consumption patterns among its young population. Today's youth are increasingly independent, making their own food choices and decisions. Adolescents are prone to eat more meals away from home than their younger siblings. The choice and timing of the meal, will be purely based on their convenience. Maintaining good nutrition in early stages is fundamental for their health and wellbeing. This study aims to investigate the trends and drivers of healthy food habits among youth in Kerala .

Keywords: Healthy food habits, Youth, Kerala, Trends, Drivers, Nutrition, Wellbeing

Introduction

Kerala is a reputed Indian state for its vibrant cultural diversity, socio-economic development, educational advancement, medicinal excellence, tranquility of peace & harmony and considering its high esteemed natural attractiveness in variance. Kerala Youth is having predominance while representing a critical demographic segment of society observation and analysis of the trends and drivers of healthy food habits / intakes of the youth is indispensable for promoting nutrition, health and overall well-being in general. The healthy prospects of food and nutrition directly influences the well-being of all generations especially the youth since they are occupy dominant force in the futuristic power of nation building, development and advanced growth in all perspectives.

The recent momentums of rapid urbanisation, intensive globalisation, aftermaths of soci-cultural changes as well as changing dynamics in day-today life instigated the youths altering the food habits, dietary choices into poor dietary habits, characterised by high intake of energy-dense, nutrient-poor foods culminated with saturated fats, which ultimately results in converging to various types of life-style diseases.

1. Traditionally, the dietary concepts of kerala is vibrant, diverse, nutritious and healthy as the culinary habits of ancient people was in conformity with the nature whereas, it undergoes substantial transformations with the generation changes. The modern youth are mostly inadvertent in food habits and indulging in absorption of junk/processed/fast/unnutritious food in contrary to the conventional culinary heritage and traditional dietary,

This circumstance makes it inevitable that awareness to promote healthy food consumption habits among the kerala youth becomes cruial in order to promote overall health, well-being, and better future prospects in all aspects. The initiatives to address fulfilment of nutritional requirements, promoting healthy dietary habits, enhancing cognitive functions, establishing vibrant / brisky / enthusiastic life-style, preserving cultural & heritage values, encourage socio-economic developments etc. are highly imperative in the present circumstance since these measures it will generate widespread positive results for Kerala Youth in particular and for whole communities / societies in general.

In spite of these adverse effects on account of changes in dietary trends, there is certain level of realization among the youth in Kerala about the prominence of health and nutrition. There is considerable number of young people exploring ways and means for healthy living while seeking information about healthy eating, dieting and fitness through various sources such as channels, social media platforms, educational programs as well as online resources. The upward trend of being conscious about health and nutrition paves the way forward for promoting positive dietary behaviours which in turn enable youths for proper selective choices of food through the information obtained, which ultimately support overall well-being in general.

It is paramount importance in light of these dynamics to explore the trends and drivers for healthy food utilization patterns of Kerala youths and recognize the possibilities for intervention for attaining dietary health and nutrition. There is prerequisite to identify the influencing factors of youths dietary habits and consumption patterns and in accordance with these parameters stakeholders are liable to develop strategies, initiatives and policy interventions to surrogate an environment of healthy food culture, nutrition, physical activities and overall well-being among the youth population of Kerala.

Healthy foods primarily associate with high nutrients, rich resources such as vitamins, minerals, proteins, carbohydrates as well as healthy fats essential for promoting overall health and well-being of human body. It also testifies that healthy food contains typically lowest saturated fats and cholesterol as well as additives like sodium and added sugar which are particularly including in variety of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins, and dairy products etc. and normal/regular consumption of these foods perceives reduced risk of chronic diseases and identified preventing disorders such as obesity and malnutrition and possible to resist even certain type of cancer in human body.

1.1 Background of the Study

The dietary habits of youth in Kerala, India, are undergoing significant changes influenced by various socio-economic, cultural, and environmental factors. Kerala, known for its rich cultural heritage, diverse cuisine, and lush landscapes, is experiencing rapid urbanisation, globalisation, and demographic shifts, leading to shifts in dietary patterns among its youth population. Traditionally, Kerala's cuisine has been characterised by an abundance of plant-based foods, fresh seafood, and coconut-based dishes, reflecting the region's agricultural abundance and coastal geography. However, with increasing exposure to Western influences, urbanisation, and changing lifestyles, there has been a notable shift towards the consumption of processed foods, fast food, and sugary beverages among Kerala's youth. This dietary transition has raised concerns about the nutritional quality of youth diets and its implications for long-term health outcomes. Poor dietary habits, characterised by high intake of energy-dense, nutrient-poor foods, are contributing to rising rates of obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, and other diet-related chronic diseases among Kerala's youth population. Hence Understanding the trends and drivers of healthy food consumption patterns among youth in Kerala is essential for addressing these challenges and promoting nutrition,

This study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the current dietary trends, socio-economic drivers, cultural influences, and health outcomes associated with youth food consumption patterns in Kerala. By identifying opportunities for intervention and promoting sustainable, culturally relevant solutions, this research seeks to empower Kerala's youth to make informed food choices that support their overall health and well-being in the context of a rapidly changing food environment.

1.2. Significance of the Study

Kerala's youth are adopting Westernised dietary patterns, resulting in increased prevalence of overweight, obesity, and chronic diseases. Cultural influences and globalisation are also contributing to this shift. Poor dietary choices increase the risk of chronic diseases like obesity, diabetes, hypertension, and cardiovascular diseases. Addressing these trends is crucial to promote nutrition, health, and well-being in Kerala's youth and foster

sustainable dietary practices for future generations. By understanding the trends and drivers of unhealthy food consumption patterns and implementing evidence-based strategies, stakeholders can promote nutrition, health, and well-being among youth in Kerala, ensuring a healthier future for generations to come

1. Public Health Implications: The study addresses the pressing public health concerns associated with unhealthy dietary habits among youth in Kerala. By understanding the factors inRuencing food consumption patterns, stakeholders can develop targeted interventions to mitigate the rising burden of diet-related chronic diseases such as obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular diseases.

2. Youth Well-being: The study is essential for promoting the well-being of Kerala's youth population by empowering them to make healthier food choices. By promoting nutrition education and awareness, the study aims to improve dietary habits and overall health outcomes among youth, enhancing their quality of life and long-term health prospects.

3. Cultural Preservation: Kerala's culinary heritage is a vital aspect of its cultural identity. By promoting healthy food consumption patterns rooted in traditional culinary practices, the study contributes to preserving Kerala's rich cultural heritage while promoting nutrition and health.

4. Socio-Economic Impact: Unhealthy dietary habits can have significant socio-economic implications, including increased healthcare costs, lost productivity, and reduced quality of life. By promoting healthier food consumption patterns, the study aims to reduce the economic burden of diet-related diseases and improve overall socio-economic outcomes in Kerala.

1.3.Objectives of the Study

1. To determine the current dietary trends among Kerala's youth, including food types, meal patterns, and frequency of consumption.

2. To study the socio-economic factors that influence unhealthyfood consumption patterns among Kerala youth, including income, education, employment status, and urbanisation.

3. To assess the health outcomes linked to unhealthy dietary patterns among Kerala youth, including their nutritional status, body weight, and prevalence of chronic disease

1.4.Methodology of the Study

This study is based on both primary data and secondary data . The primary data is collected from youth by administering a structured questionnaire. Apart from the primary data collected ,we try to collect information from the internet, earlier project reports. Population contains the youth in the the age group 15-26 in Kerala .Sample size is 100. Stratified Smpling method is used for sampling.

Questionnaire was divided into three parts:

- Demographic profile
- Diet history
- Food frequency questionnaire

The questionnaire was validated one and was developed with the consent of experts in health and community level. The respondence were asked to fill the questionnaire. Afer filling up of questionnaire, data was collected and coded

properly and entered in Excel sheet (Microsoft Excel 2007) and relevant data checking measures were used to make certain the quality of data collected, afterwards data was analysed with the use of SPSS software version 16.0. Frequency and percentage were used to analyse demographic and consumption pattern whereas Chi-Square test was used to find the association between rural, semi-urban and urban locals with food that are consumed.

Period of study is January 2024- June 2024

1.5. Findings of the Study

The study reveals a growing awareness among Kerala's youth regarding the importance of healthy eating. The following are the key findings of the study.

1. Incidence of Healthy Food Consumption: A major proportion of youth especially 30-45 age group in Kerala exhibits a preference for healthy food options, with a notable proportion engaging in regular consumption of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.

2. Drivers of Healthy Food Consumption:

Taste preferences play a crucial role in promoting healthy food consumption, as many youth in Kerala prioritise flavour and quality when making dietary choices.

Convenience also influences healthy food consumption, with easily accessible options contributing to higher intake of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains among youth.

Cultural influences, including traditional dietary practices and family customs, contribute to the promotion of healthy eating habits among Kerala's youth population.

Peer influence plays a significant role, with social norms and peer groups influencing dietary choices and encouraging healthy eating behaviours among youth.

Increased awareness through educational campaigns and nutrition programs has positively impacted the adoption of healthy eating habits among Kerala's youth.

3. Barriers to Healthy Food Consumption:

Despite the prevalence of healthy food consumption, barriers such as affordability and availability of nutritious options, especially in urban areas, remain a concern.

Busy lifestyles and time constraints may lead to a reliance on convenience foods, potentially compromising the overall quality of the diet among some youth.

Suggestions and Conclusion

1. Education and Awareness:

Implement comprehensive nutrition education programs targeting youth in schools and communities to raise awareness about the importance of healthy eating habits. Utilise social media and digital platforms to disseminate information on nutrition, cooking tips, and the benefits of a balanced diet.

2. Accessibility and Affordability:

Increase the availability and affordability of fresh fruits, vegetables, and whole grains through initiatives such as farmers' markets, community gardens, and subsidies for healthy food purchases.

Encourage partnerships between local government authorities and private businesses to establish healthy food outlets in urban areas, promoting easy access to nutritious options.

3. Cultural Sensitivity: Incorporate traditional Kerala cuisine into educational materials and promotional campaigns, emphasising the health benefits of local ingredients and cooking methods. Engage community leaders and influencers to promote cultural practices that prioritise healthy eating and sustainable food choices.

Conclusion

The study suggests a positive trend towards healthy food consumption among youth in Kerala, driven by factors such as taste preferences, convenience, cultural influences, and peer dynamics. While there are challenges such as affordability and availability of nutritious options, efforts to promote education, increase accessibility, and celebrate cultural diversity can further enhance healthy eating habits among Kerala's youth population. By addressing these factors and implementing targeted interventions, Kerala can continue to foster a culture of health and well-being among its younger generations.

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