

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

THE PREVALENCE OF UNHEALTHY SNACKING BEHAVIOUR AND ITS ASSOCIATION WITH INDIVIDUAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS IN KUCHING, SARAWAK

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ABSTRACT

Unhealthy snacking behaviour among young people is a growing public health concern because of its negative consequences on health. This study was to determine the prevalence of unhealthy snacking behaviour and its determinants among college students in Kuching. In this cross-sectional study, 12 colleges in Kuching were stratified into private and government colleges. Three private and three government colleges were selected through a stratified random sampling method. A total of 422 respondents (male 49.5%, female 50.5%) were recruited in this study. A self-administered questionnaire was used to gather data regarding unhealthy snacking behaviour and its determinants (gender, food preferences, type of school and courses, taste-and-sensory perception, nutritional knowledge, perceived self-efficacy, and cost/price sensitivity, perceived parental control, easy accessibility, and media advertisements influence) among respondents. The survey was conducted online via e-mail/Whatsapp. Multiple binary logistic regression analysis was used to analyse the data. A quarter of the respondents (24.6%) practised unhealthy snacking behaviour. More than half of the respondents (58.3%) consumed unhealthy snacks one to three times per week. A minority of the respondents (17.1%) claimed that they did not consume any unhealthy snacks for the past month. The final model explained 15.7% of the total variance. Taste-and-sensory perception (Adjusted OR = 2.20, 95%CI [1.55, 3.13], $p < 0.001$) and nutritional knowledge (Adjusted OR = 1.48, 95%CI [1.12, 1.97], $p < 0.05$) were positively associated with unhealthy snacking behaviour among respondents. The present study suggested the stakeholders concentrate on nutritional knowledge and taste-and-sensory perception among college students in future intervention development.

Keywords: Unhealthy snacking behaviour, Individual factors, Environmental factors, College students, Kuching, Sarawak.

INTRODUCTION

Most people perceived that snacks are small portion packaged, nutrient-poor, low-price foods, or beverages^{1,2}, and snacking refers to consume energy outside of breakfast, lunch, and dinner³. Nevertheless, the definition of snacks was remaining inconsistent⁴, because the scientific consensus about what constitutes a snack does not exist⁵, either the snacks consumed between meals or the snacks consumed during the meal as a meal replacement⁶. By definition, snacks can be divided into unhealthy snacks and healthy snacks. Unhealthy snacks commonly referred to as nutrient-poor food or beverages that are high in calories, fat, sodium, and/or sugar, such as potato chips, crackers, pickles, cakes, ice-cream, chocolate, candy, sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs), nuggets, sausages, and french fries^{3,7,8}. In contrast, for healthy snacks, the first ingredient should be vegetable/fruit, dairy product, protein food, or a grain product that at least contains one-half of whole grains by weight; or a combination food that contains at least a quarter cup of vegetable/fruit. Additionally, a healthy snack should also meet the nutrient guidelines for calories, sugar, sodium, and fats⁹.

Consuming unhealthy snacks has become a public health concern¹⁰⁻¹² because it has been discovered that it is one of the risk factors for metabolic syndrome and diet-related noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), particularly obesity, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and hyperlipidemia¹³⁻¹⁵. Mithra, Unnikrishnan, and Thapar et al. (2018) defined any individual that repeatedly consumed unhealthy snacks more than three times per week considered as unhealthy snacking behaviour¹⁶.

The college-going age population, mainly around 18-24 years old, is also called late-adolescents or young adults^{17,18}. This period was associated with critical changes in physical, mental, emotional, social lifestyle, as well as eating behaviour¹⁹. Meanwhile, adolescents' lack of risk perception of NCDs^{20,21} may lead to unhealthy snacking behaviours as a result of taste-and-sensory perception, nutritional knowledge, easy accessibility, and media pressure²². Therefore, the main purpose of this research was to determine the prevalence of unhealthy snacking behaviour and its associated factors among college students in Kuching. The implication of this study may provide advantages of concentrating on the significant determinants in