

Assessment of knowledge, attitudes and practices of Saudi adults about calorie labeling in central Saudi Arabia

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Background

Consuming a healthy diet throughout one's life-course reduces the risk of obesity. Moreover, increased consumption of processed food and urbanization are changing the lifestyles of the population worldwide. As a part of Saudi Arabia's vision of 2030 to promote a healthier lifestyle, the Saudi Food and Drug Administration implemented a law that took effect in December 2018 that mandates that the menus of all restaurants, cafés, ice cream shops, fresh juice shops, bakeries and supermarkets must provide calorie information to their consumers by displaying it on monitors and printed menus.

Objectives

The aim of this study is to assess the knowledge, attitudes, and practices of adults regarding the implementation of mandatory calorie labeling in restaurants and cafes in Riyadh the capital of Saudi Arabia

Methods

This was a cross-sectional study of 1443 adults invited to complete a self-administered questionnaire consisting of 4 parts that assess demographics, knowledge, attitudes, and practices of mandatory menu labeling. The survey was conducted in all 5 regions of Riyadh. Pearson's Chi-square test was applied to determine statistical significance between categorical variables, except when cell sizes were less than 5 Fischer test was then applied. Logistic regression was performed to ascertain the effect (odd ratio) of the participants' characteristics on the study outcomes.

Results

We entered 1265 surveys into final data analysis with a response rate of 88%. Of this, 1036 participants (82%) understood the meaning and values of calories, while 53% knew the average daily caloric intake. Regarding participants' attitudes, 1053 (83%) perceived the importance of calorie labeling and (88%) supported this policy. Approximately 50% (n=626) Original Article of the participants were significantly more likely to be influenced by the calorie labeling to place a healthier order. Married ($p=0.050$), educated $p<0.001$, and higher monthly income ($p<0.001$) were significantly influenced to place a healthier restaurant order compared to their peers.

| Assessment | Answer | n (%) |
|---|--------|-----------|
| Knowledge | | |
| Did you notice that there are calories displayed on menus? | Yes | 1096 (87) |
| Do you understand the meaning and value of calories? | Yes | 1036 (82) |
| Do you know the average recommended daily caloric intake for adults? | Yes | 665 (53) |
| Attitudes | | |
| In your opinion, is the calorie labeling on menus important to the consumer? | Yes | 1053 (83) |
| Do you support the new policy mandating that restaurants display calories on their menus? | Yes | 1112 (88) |
| Practices | | |
| Has the number of calories displayed on menus influenced you order? | Yes | 626 (50) |
| <i>How did it influence your order?</i> | | |
| Changed your order to a healthier option | | 220 (17) |
| Decreased the amount of food ordered | | 268 (21) |
| Lessened the frequency of eating outside your home | | 138 (11) |
| No change | | 639 (51) |

Table - Assessment of knowledge, attitudes, and practices of participants.

Conclusion

Adults in Riyadh showed satisfactory knowledge, attitude, and practice since the implementation of this policy. Our findings showed that knowing the value of calories and average caloric intake had a significant positive influence for a healthier diet. This highlights the importance of menu labeling regulations campaigns for the public.