



Mapping the Foodways among the College going Youth in the Post Pandemic Era

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This paper seeks to explore the changes in foodways among the college going youth in the aftermath of the pandemic. The pandemic has altered our lifestyle in numerous ways with the most profound impact seen on the dietary habits. The covid-19 induced lockdowns and restrictions changed everything from how we procured to how we consumed food. The paper would map out the changes in the daily dietary habits and culinary practices of the youth post the pandemic experience. Young people are especially vulnerable to changes in dietary habits, as their eating patterns are still developing. Understanding the impact of COVID-19 on their eating habits will help in identifying potential areas of concern and develop appropriate interventions and policies to promote healthy lifestyle. This paper adds valuable input to the limited research on the post -covid impact on the eating habits and culinary practices of the youth which is essential for understanding the pandemic's broader implications and developing effective strategies to support public health and well-being.

Key words:- eating habits, youth, covid-19, foodways, culinary practices

Introduction

The year 2020 was a year of change in innumerable ways. The Covid- 19 pandemic hit mankind in the most unexpected way and claimed millions of lives globally. It urged us to look at life from a fresh perspective and brought unprecedented changes in our daily lives as well. Covid-19 forced us to re-evaluate the ways we live, work, learn and consume information and it continues do so. The pandemic brought attention and focus to the importance of health and wellness. Food and eating habits were a major focus point for everyone from patients recovering from the disease, to healthy individuals who wanted to steer clear of the disease. The internet, television, newspaper, magazines and all other possible forms of mass media were abuzz and obsessed with the word “immunity”. People dug out all possible information on immunity building foods

and the long forgotten and discarded traditional recipes for various kinds of decoctions. The pandemic brought forth the importance of good dietary practices and compelled us to take a hard look at our lifestyle choices.

Every individual's daily routine was disrupted as a result of the lockdown imposed by the Indian government, which resulted in the total incarceration of the population in their homes. The access to basic necessities like fresh fruits, vegetables, dairy products was also restricted that did create panic and stress among people. The restaurants and food delivery outlets were also closed further aggravating problems for people dependent on them for their daily meals. These Covid induced restrictions led to a change in our dietary patterns and lifestyle choices (Singh et al.,2021) Chronic stress is known to have negative impacts on overall health and can alter people's health behaviors, including their eating patterns. Cartwright, et al. (2003) discovered that stress had an effect on adolescents' eating patterns as they reported lower consumption of fruits and vegetables and higher consumption of snacks and other fatty foods. These results suggest that the COVID-19 pandemic is related to chronic stress, which may result in dietary changes. Lower age groups were observed to consume more junk food, including packaged sweets, baked goods, sweet beverages, and salty snacks during COVID-19 confinement, according to a study on Italian teenagers (Di Renzo et al. 2020) On the other hand, according to other researchers, teenagers in Spain, Italy, Brazil, Chile, and Colombia significantly boosted their consumption of fruits, vegetables, and legumes during the pandemic (Ruiz-Roso et al., 2020)

To date, the majority of studies examining the impact of COVID-19 on dietary habits have been conducted on a global scale. All of these studies, however, were conducted either immediately following the COVID-19 lockdown or while it was in operation. Additionally, no contemporary studies have been conducted to evaluate changes that have occurred following the lockdown, and there is limited information on this subject available from India. To fill this gap, the current study set out to evaluate the post COVID-19 influences on foodways among the college going youth.

Methodology

Mixed method approach was used for the present study. It was considered to be more relevant as it allowed researcher to gain more in-depth understanding which would not have been possible with a single structured approach. For data collection, the tools of questionnaire and semi-structured interviews were employed. Purposive sampling was used to select the respondents.

Data collection and sample

The data was collected from 100 students from Chandigarh University, Gharoun. The respondents comprised of 53 girls and 47 boys. The respondents were approached and asked for their consent for participation in the study. The willing ones were interviewed and asked to fill the questionnaire.

Literature review

The pandemic has altered our lifestyle in numerous ways with the most profound impact seen on the dietary habits. The covid-19 induced lockdowns and restrictions changed everything from how we procured to how we consumed food. The impact of pandemic induced dietary alterations can be seen immensely crucial for young people. Healthy living habits are formed throughout childhood and strengthened during adolescence. The early years of life are critical for acquiring and maintaining healthy habits since they have a major impact on health later in life. Youngsters are more receptive to novelty and change, which can be advantageous in some situations, but they are also more susceptible to sudden shifts.

Several studies indicate that people have switched to or are more inclined towards a healthier diet rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes and lesser processed food products in the aftermath of the pandemic. The preference for home cooked has been on the rise following concerns of hygiene, personal safety and social distancing. (Lombardo et al. ,2021, George M.S.R, Parasnis,A 2020, Danley, 2020, Saxena & Limbad, 2021, Ahuja, 2020) A joint study by Pepsi Co. India and Euromonitor international on “ Impact of Covid-19 on the nutrition choices of urban Indian consumer in 2021” revealed that 53% urban consumers are becoming ingredient conscious for breakfast cereals and over Nearly 90% urban consumers are willing to pay more for healthy alternatives. Also Nutritionist recommendation now plays an important role during purchase of food items. A study on impact of covid-19 on food consumption patterns of Indian adolescent girls revealed a marginal improvement in consumption of immunity boosting foods such as ginger, garlic, fruits and beverages like lemon water, herbal tea and turmeric milk during pandemic. A reduction in consumption of junk food and meat products was also observed among adolescents (Singh, Wadhwan,2021) Nirala et al., 2022 observed similar results among university students during the lockdown with increased consumption of milk products, fruits and beverages like kadha, herbal tea and warm lemon water. A decrease in consumption of fast food, sugar sweetened beverages and meat products was observed among students. Increase in consumption of food was reported by nearly half the students during lockdown. Pattanayak et al., 2022 observed the dietary changes among college girls over the three waves of covid-19 revealing an inclination towards healthier immunity building foods during the first wave. However, during the last wave of the pandemic a lean towards unhealthy foods could be observed. Despite that, there was an increased awareness among the girls regarding immunity building and nutritious foods and increased interest in learning about nutritional aspects of food.

Results and Discussion

Changes in food consumption patterns

- **Changes in consumption of fruits**

Majority of respondents (73%) reported no significant change in the consumption of fruits after the pandemic. The consumption of fruits remained the same as was before the pandemic with occasional consumption as and when their favourite fruit was available. The respondents informed that even

though they were aware of the nutritional and immunity boosting benefits of the fruits, inclusion of them in their daily diet was a hassle to them.

- **Changes in consumption of vegetables**

A majority of respondents (62%) reported an increase in their consumption of vegetables after the pandemic. They felt that vegetables were important for a healthy and complete meal. Increase in consumption of vegetables like ghiya (bottle gourd), tinda, green beans, karela(bitter gourd) which were not consumed by respondents before pandemic was reported by respondents.

- **Changes in consumption of meat products**

A good number of respondents reported no change in consumption pattern of meat products after the pandemic. Respondents reported that the frequency of meat consumption was affected during the lockdown due to restricted supply and fear mongering due to media and news channels. After the easing of lockdown and normalancy of the markets their meat consumption patterns were restored to ones before the pandemic.

- **Changes in consumption of packaged drinks**

Majority of respondents (54%) reported a decrease in the consumption of packaged drinks like juices and soft drinks after the pandemic. Respondents reported they preferred fresh juices over the packaged ones and in case of choosing a packaged juice they looked for variants with added benefits like aloe vera and zero sugar ones.

- **Changes in consumption of organic products**

No significant change was reported by participants on the consumption of organic products after the pandemic. Respondents reported they did not consume much organic products before the pandemic and the status was the same after the pandemic as well.

- **Inclusion of Immunity building foods in diet**

A significant number of respondents (45%) reported to include immunity building foods in their diet post covid. Some of the common products incorporated by respondents were giloy juice, amla juice, chawanprash and lemon ginger and honey tea. Respondents were of the view that these items would provide some benefits for immunity and might compensate for unhealthy and junk food items consumed by them.

- **Changes in consumption of processed food at home**

Majority of respondents (56%) reported that there was a decrease in consumption of processed foods like maggi, namkeens and chips at home after the pandemic. There was a shift towards healthier snack items like makhanas, pocorns, ragi and soya chips, banana chips, and granola bars.

- **Impact on consumption of outside food**

Majority of respondents (89%) reported that there was no change in their consumption of outside food after the pandemic. They enjoyed eating out with their friends and family with slightly increased concern for hygiene. A good number of participants also reported that they preferred to order food at home now after the pandemic through the food delivery applications rather than going out.

Changes in culinary practices

- **Change in cooking frequency**

A majority of respondents (63%) reported to cooking more after the pandemic even if it was for snacks or small meals. Respondents reported they enjoyed cooking during the pandemic and have continued the practice after the pandemic as well. The respondents were also asked whether they had any increased interest in learning new recipes and cooking skills. A significant number of respondents reported that they have an increased interest in learning healthy snack recipes which they can enjoy guilt free and are also tasty.

- **Importance of cooking as a skill**

The respondents were asked whether they considered cooking as an important skill after experiencing lockdown. Majority of respondents (90%) affirmed that cooking is an important skill and everyone should know how to cook basic meals to combat adverse situations like the lockdowns.

- **Change in overall diet quantity or frequency**

The respondents were inquired if they had observed any changes in the frequency or quantity of diet consumed by them after the pandemic. Majority of respondents(85%) reported no significant change in the quantity or frequency of their diet.

Conclusion

As per the results of the study it can be concluded that there is an increased awareness among the youth regarding healthy dietary practices. Increased consumption of vegetables among respondents after pandemic indicates awareness regarding healthier and nutritious meals. Even though no significant change has been observed in the consumption of outside food but a shift toward healthier choices can be seen with the youth being more aware of nutritional value of different food items. The most significant change can be observed in the snacking behavior of youth where consumption of processed snacks and packaged drinks has seen a decline with preference for more plant based, fresh and healthier snacks. There has also been an increase in learning healthy snack recipes among the respondents revealing integration of healthier food products in their diet. These changes can be seen as a positive outcome of the pandemic with increased awareness of healthier diet and food choices among the youth. To sustain these healthy practices, initiatives of the government by promoting and making accessible healthier snacks can be the first step in weaning the youth from unhealthy eating practices. The changes may help in reversing the increased risk of obesity and NCD's among the youth with increased promotion and availability of healthier food choices in the market. These changes are necessary for the health of the people and overall development of the country as they can bring down the peaking graph of lifestyle diseases which are a hindrance for the progress of country and its citizens.

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