

OP 10

A cross-sectional survey of food habit changes during COVID-19 pandemic among local residents of Sri Lanka

Wijekumar PJ¹, Samarana VA², Kanchana KTG^{3*}

¹Department of Biomedical Science, Faculty of Health Sciences, Kaatsu International University, Sri Lanka, ²Department of Medical Science in Acupuncture, Faculty of Health Sciences, Kaatsu International University, Sri Lanka, ³Department of Nursing, Faculty of Health Sciences, Kaatsu International University, Sri Lanka.

Background: The Sri Lankan government had imposed a nationwide curfew effective from March to May 2020 due to rising cases of COVID 19. The confinement to one's home and restriction to move out of the home impacted the population's daily life in terms of mental health, lifestyle, and food habits.

Objective: The objective of this study was to determine the food habit changes during the COVID-19 pandemic among the local residents of Sri Lanka.

Method: A cross-sectional survey was conducted in May 2020, among Sri Lankan residents to assess the healthy eating. Healthy eating means eating a variety of foods that give you the nutrients you need to maintain your health, feel good, and have energy. The study was conducted among 562 participants using snowball sampling technique via a pre-tested online questionnaire after obtaining ethical approval (KIU/ERC/20/47) from KIU. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and t-test using SPSS software version 25.

Results: Among the participants, the majority were females (73.1%), and the mean age was 24.8±5.7 years. Participants' concern over healthy eating according to Ministry of Health Nutritional division was increased by 3.2% during the curfew period compared to the earlier situation of 29% in healthy eating. The participants had consumed food that contained sweets (44.1%), salt (35.4%), fat (35.2%), carbohydrates excess food (46.1%), and protein contacting food (35.8%) as well as fresh fruits (42.2%), and fresh vegetables (42.5%), before the curfew. During the curfew, consumption of food was identified as more sweets (40%, p=0.001), salt (36.5%, p=0.001), carbohydrate (45.4%, p=0.001), fat (34.7%, p=0.001), protein (39.7%, p=0.001), fresh fruits (31.5%, p=0.001), and fresh vegetables (48%, p=0.001). Comparing the means of food intake, except for main meals showed a significant difference (p=0.015) before and during curfew.

Conclusion: The study showed an increased level of concern on healthy eating and increased consumption rates of fresh vegetables (p=0.001), and proteins (p=0.001), while a decline was reported in consuming sweets (p=0.001), and carbohydrate (p=0.001) rich foods during the curfew period. However, it is necessary to raise awareness on healthy food habits according to the national guidelines.