



## Fast food consumption & its impact on adolescents

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### Abstract

The present study was conducted with an aim to study the impact of fast food consumption on meal pattern of adolescents of Delhi (India). A survey was administered on students of different colleges of Delhi. Students were studying different courses in selected colleges of Delhi. Initially, permission was taken from the selected colleges to gather the sample for the present study. Purposive random sampling technique was used to select the sample. Role of demographic parameters, different perception factors and personal behavioural measures were studied. Questionnaire was administered on the sample to collect the data. Overall, it has been found that the consumption of fast food was high among students. Fast food consumption is often associated with higher income groups and adolescents.

**Background:** In the past few decades, the fast growth of the fast-food industry has led to an increased consumption of food prepared away from home that is high in total and saturated fat, as well as sodium, but low in dietary fibre, calcium, and iron.

In recent years, there has been a marked increase in the rates of obesity in countries such as India that has been attributed to unhealthy lifestyle practices associated with the introduction of Western-style fast foods that are higher in fat and refined carbohydrates. Fast Foods have become a part of today's life. Fast Foods are relatively low-cost foods purchased at an outlet featuring quick service and convenience. (Karen Penner, 1999).

**Keywords:** fast food consumption, meal pattern

### Introduction

#### Street Foods & Fast Foods

Diet plays a very important role in growth and development of adolescents, during which the development of healthy eating habits is of supreme importance. There is a dual burden of under nutrition and over nutrition in this age-group.

Fast food has become a prominent feature of the diet of adolescents in India and, increasingly, throughout the world. However, few studies have examined the effects of fast-food consumption on any nutrition or health-related outcome.

Fast food is a mass-produced food that is prepared and served very quickly. The food is typically less nutritionally valuable compared to other foods and dishes. While any meal with low preparation time can be considered fast food, typically the term refers to food sold in a restaurant or store with frozen, preheated or precooked ingredients, and served to the customer in a packaged form for take-out/take-away. In India, so-called "street foods" are regarded as being foods or beverages that are sold by the informal sector. Street foods are generally sold from stands/stalls (usually not permanent structures) on the pavement of busy streets in both urban and rural areas, usually at a lower cost than fast foods. Hence they provide an accessible source of food to poorer people. Generally only a few food items and beverages are for sale and many vendors sell the same items. Often these items include snacks such as crisps and drinks such as soft drinks; however cooked foods are also sold, frequently on site. Fast foods on the other hand are sold from outlets in formal structures such as buildings and malls and frequently operate as a franchise. The term "Fast Food" refers more accurately to

the style of service than to the food itself. Street foods often reflect traditional local cultures and exist in endless variety. There is much diversity in the raw materials as well as in the preparation of Street Food beverages, snacks and meals. Vendors have low cost seating facilities which are sometimes rudimentary and are usually owned and operated by individual families but benefits from their trade extend throughout the local economy. In contrast, fast foods outlets specialize in fewer foods, which are usually prepared by frying. Hamburgers, Chicken Chips and Pizza often predominate. These enterprises, which are usually indoors, invest heavily in seating, air conditioning and bright décor. Marketing strategies are almost exclusively, dependent on advertising, sponsorship and special offers which aim to create brand loyalty.

The study was conducted keeping in mind the vulnerability of adolescents to quickly prepared Fast Foods and their effects on the Family meal patterns, dietary impact.

The study was divided into 2 phases:

Phase I – Consisted of preliminary study of Fast Food menus offered in different kinds of establishments in Delhi and Fast Food consumption patterns among Adolescents through the survey of the outlets. Rapport was established with schools and Adolescents to make them comfortable while imparting information. It involved the collection of the data on the consumption patterns of Fast Foods among Adolescents and the usual home pattern, by using the questionnaire.

Phase II – Comprised of interpreting the data collected to study the impact of Fast Food consumption as revealed from the filled questionnaire (from phase I).

**Data Collection**

The data was collected using the above tools. For Phase I, of the study, various Fast Foods were visited and their menu structure was studied through the different kinds of menus collected from each establishment.

In Phase II, the students were briefed about the objectives of the study; the designed questionnaire was delivered to them personally by the researcher and completed by an interactive session. The questionnaire designed for mothers of Adolescents were given to the adolescents to take home and get filled, which were collected from them in the next visit. Efforts were made by the researcher to contact either of the parents to get the clear picture of the responses.

**Locale of the Study**

The study was conducted on the Adolescents of different colleges of Delhi. The selection of the colleges was done on the following basis:

- a. Existence of number of colleges desired in the same area.
- b. Easy accessibility to the researcher.
- c. Easy accessibility to a number of different kinds of Fast Food outlets from that area.

**Sample Selection**

A sample of the study consisted of 100 adolescents (both boys and girls) comprising of age group 15 years to 18 years from different co-educational, institutes of city. Equal number of males and females were taken to study the sex difference in attitudes and eating out patterns.

**Tools & Techniques**

Questionnaire for mothers; Questionnaire for students and Food frequency questionnaire were used to collect the data. Questionnaires were designed to gain both qualitative and quantitative information from the sample.

Eating behaviour was assessed with several questions. Frequency of eating out was measured by the sum of the number of times students reported eating breakfast, lunch, dinner or snacks prepared away from home. Frequency of snacking and use of prepared foods such as frozen, canned or microwave dinners (per week) were self-reported.

**Results & Discussion**

Data collected from the questionnaire comprised of socio-demographic and different perceptions characteristics of study participants.

The data collected through the study was analyzed and the results obtained are presented as follows:

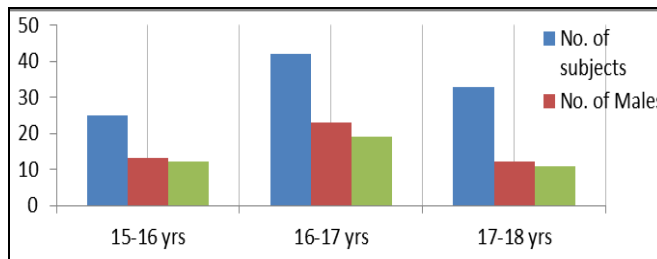
**General Profile of Subjects**

The subjects of the study were adolescents belonging to different streams of different colleges falling in the age group of 18-20 years. Of the total number of subjects 50% were males and 50% were females. Only 25% belonged to joint families rest were from nuclear families.

The age of the mothers ranged between 46-50 years, most of the mothers was educated and had a high level of awareness about fast foods. 65% of them were working rest were housewives.

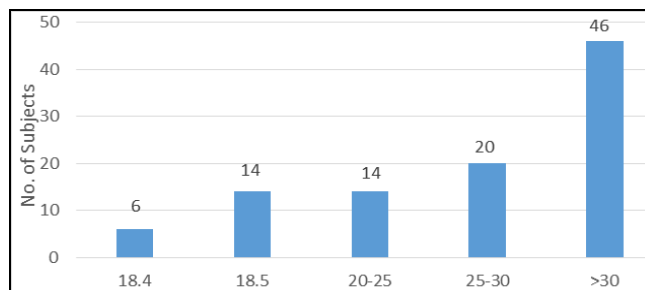
The above table shows that there is a noticeable difference

between the sexes. In age group of 15-18 years the females predominate the males, whereas, in 15-18 years age group there was no noticeable difference, but again in the 18 +years age group the males predominated.



\*The age has been rounded off to the nearest whole number.

**Fig 1: Age Profile of the Subjects**



**Fig 2: Basal Metabolic Rate (Bmr) of the Subjects**

**Table 1: Preference of Eating Point**

	Males N= 50 (%age)	Females N=50 (%age)
Fast Food Establishment	35 (70)	27 (54)
Street Vendors	15 (30)	23 (46)

Both males (70%) and females (54%) preferred eating out at Fast Food establishments. Greater number of females (46%) opted to eat from street vendors, as they enjoyed foods like chat, gol-gappas, pav-bhaji and alike which only 30% of the males indulged in the same.

**Table 2: Families Frequency of Eating Out**

Outing	%age
Once in a week	7
More than once a week	32
Once in a month	59
Very rare	2

The data shows that the maximum number of families (59%) ate out once a month. 32% of them were eating out more than once in a week; 7% once in a week & only 2% of them hardly visit any eating point. It is revealed that the higher percentage of mothers went out to eat only once a month as compared to adolescents.

**Peer Pressure**

There is a clear indication about fast-food being more consumed by adolescents due to peer pressure, as eating home cooked food is considered to be out of trend among peer groups.

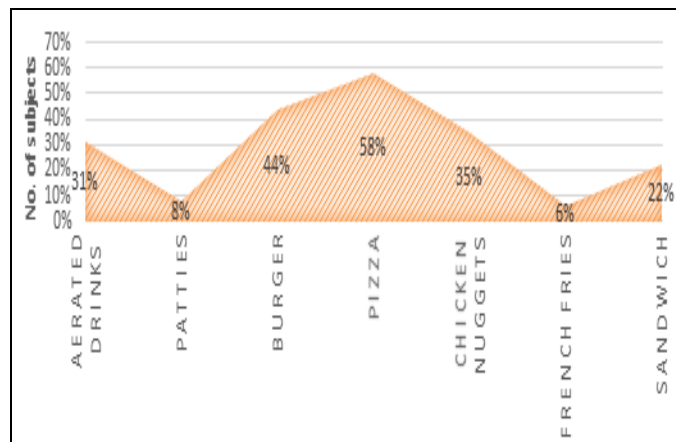
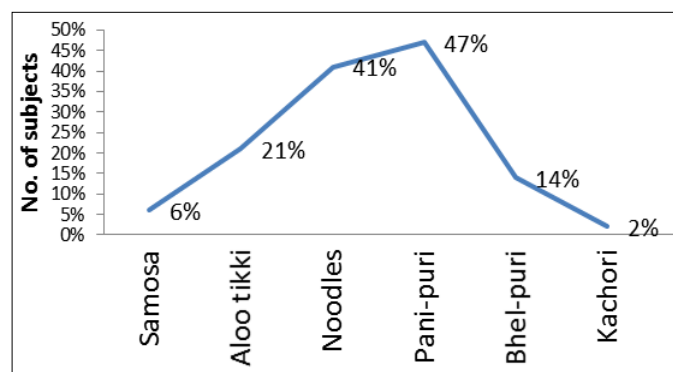


Fig 3: Fast Food Consumption Pattern of Adolescents

**Consumption pattern of different fast food**

The above table depicts that majority of the students (58%) like to have “pizza” followed by burger (44%); 35% of them prefer “chicken nuggets”; 31% go in for ‘aerated drinks’; only 8% of them go in for “patties” and 6% for French fries twice in a week. Sometimes it is thrice a week as well.



\*Multiple responses

Fig 4: Street Food Consumption Pattern of Adolescents

**Consumption pattern of different street foods**

The data reveals that pani-puri (gol-gappas) was the most popular among all Street Foods which were consumed by 40% to 50% of the subjects daily or 3-6 times a week. Next in popularity were noodles which were consumed by 41% of the daily or 3-6 times a week. This data also shows that the kachori was least preferred item among the items which subject ate.

**Environment Variables At Home**

It is generally observed that families where adolescents eat together with other members of the household are found to be more habitual of liking home cooked meals compared to fast food. Due to change in life style, especially because of increasing trend of maternal employment, packed food/lunch are avoided among adolescents. Change in meal patterns, availability of variety of food products in the market and exposure to newer foods, the kinds of items prepared at home has also changed. There is a great demand of frozen and microwave cooked foods, junk foods, ready to cook food because of shortage of time.

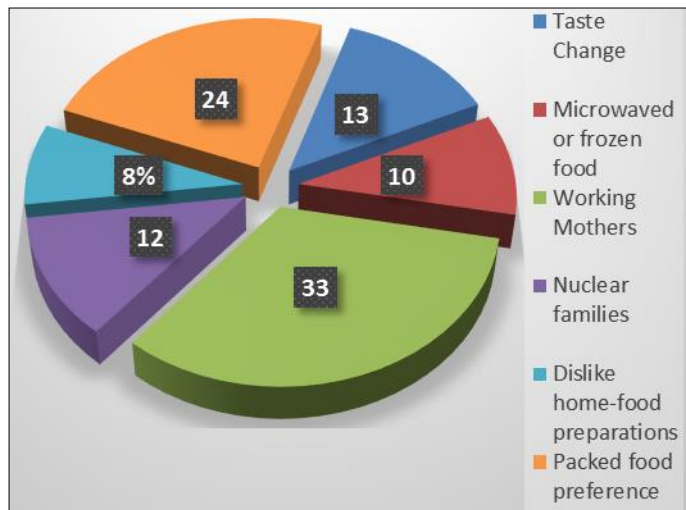


Fig 4: Environment Variables at home

**Preference for Packed Lunch**

It is an old practice that people leaving their homes for work, school, and college carry packed lunches. The data revealed that 24% of the subjects prefer carrying packed lunch to the college. Rest other are not at all interested carrying packed food as they feel insulted and humiliated. Lunch usually consisted of sandwiches, followed by parantha and sabzi.

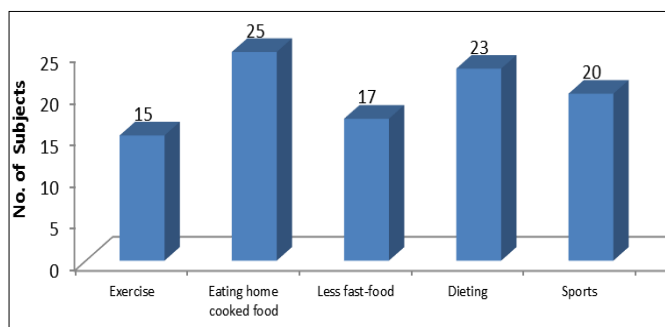


Fig 5: Ways to stay healthy

It was also observed that health conscious parents even if allowing fast food consumption were motivating their wards to exercise, play outdoor games or walk to stay healthy. Even in the first boom of fast food, people have been knowing this kind of food is unhealthy. The labels people attach to fast food are always “high in calories”, “low in nutritional value”, “obesity” and “additives”. Now it is a common sense that fast food is harmful to body fitness.

**Conclusion**

Consumption of fast food has become a global phenomenon and is especially popular among young adults and adolescents. Several studies have been conducted to this focus group— university students. Indians from a high-income group were more familiar with fast food as it is defined in the West, and they dined at fast food restaurants more frequently. Furthermore, they were more likely to report that they enjoyed eating at Western-style fast food restaurants compared to their low-income counterparts; On the other hand, Indians living in a low-income neighbourhood were more likely to buy and

report food sold by street vendors as fast food. Overall, consumption of fast food was high among a population of Indians from Delhi, as there is a rapid expansion of fast food establishments and the city is undergoing rapid economic growth, which has led to an increase in fast food consumption among Indian adolescents. Interventions to reduce reliance on fast food restaurants may need to address perceived importance of healthy eating as well as time and convenience barriers.

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