



Study on Practice and Perception of Beneficial and Ill Health Effects of Food Items In Rural Area Of Pondicherry

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Abstract

Introduction: *There is an agreement and disagreement among people about the effect of foods on health status of individuals. Some attribute to systemic symptoms as they perceive it as causative factor. It is necessary to know the prevalence of such belief in the community from time to time.*

Objectives: *To know the practice and perception of beneficial and ill health effects of food items in rural area of Pondicherry.*

Methodology: *It is a cross sectional study done between the time period of March and April 2015 among 317 families and their members at their doorsteps. Pretested questionnaire was filled with the information given by the subjects after their verbal consent. Descriptive questions regarding the family's perception. Criteria like the ill health effects of those food items, effects of those foods on pregnancy, children, etc, beneficial effects of hot/cold foods and foods avoided during different seasons.*

Results: *During summer season, 37.6% of the people avoided chicken and 26.6% avoided mango. During winter season, 32.6% avoided curd, 25.6% avoided ice-cream. During pregnancy, 21.6% avoided papaya and 12.6% avoided pineapple. For infants, 2% avoided mango and ice cream was avoided by 1% for the infants. It is concluded that the perception of food items as hot or cold is strong and necessary to create awareness in this community. Some of the foods were considered as benefit and harmful to specific groups in the family.*

Conclusion: *There are few beneficial aspect and ill effects according the community perception, misconception and misunderstanding are existing on food items. Community should be periodically educated about the myths of ill effects of hot or cold food items.*

Key Words: *Beneficial effects, ill effects, avoided foods, perception.*

INTRODUCTION

The theory of hot and cold effects of food has prevailed in our culture since time immemorial.^[1,2] It is a system parallel to modern biomedical sciences and it has been observed in our society that the theory of hot and cold is believed in and practiced by almost all section of the society. In the more developed countries the modern biomedical paradigm tends to disregard this theory altogether stating it to be 'too variable and inconsistent'.^[3,4] On the contrary in countries of the east including Pakistan even medical practitioners have a firm belief in the effects of food on the body.^[4] The points need to be made that variability, disagreement and inconsistencies are not evidence enough to prove that a system is moribund.^[5] It does suggest however that the system is less organized and may lead to outgrowth of many myths can be overwhelming, as in many times observed and reported.^[4-7] This study was conducted with an objective know the practice and perception of beneficial and ill health effects of food items in rural area of Pondicherry.

MATERILS AND METHODS

Our study area was in the villages of Pillaichavadi and Kalapet of rural Pondicherry with total population of 11979 residents. It is a cross sectional and descriptive study done between March and April 2015. The study subjects were three hundred families who were surveyed at their doorstep using the questionnaires. Selection of families was done at random and information given by the family members was recorded.

Data was collected on perceptions about the ill health effects of those food items, effects of those foods on pregnancy, children, etc, beneficial effects of hot/cold foods and foods avoided during different seasons. The information recorded was used to assess the existing food beliefs and community's perception of hot and cold food items.

The hot foods are considered as those which when consumed produces hot effects to the body and cold foods produces cold effects to the body on consumption according to the family's individual perception.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Three hundred family members perception was studied in detail to explore the Ill health effects of hot food items as shown in Table 1. Gastro intestinal tract systems like stomach pain were told by 53.6% and diarrhoea by 20.6% of the people. Genito-urinary symptoms like burning micturition were 20% and oliguria by 4.3% of the people. Dermatological illness like skin rashes were told by 16.6% and generalised body itching by 9.3% of the people. 40% of the people told other illness which includes chicken pox, hot flushes, etc.

In ill health effects of cold food items, respiratory illnesses like Nasal discharge were told by 29.6%, cough by 15.1%, wheezing by 14.3%, sneezing by 14.3% of the people as told by them. Fever was told by 60.3% of the people and 24.3% of the people mentioned other illness like headache, sore throat etc.

Table 2 shows that during summer season, 37.6% of the people avoided chicken and 26.6% avoid mango. During winter season, 32.6% and 25.6 % avoided curd and ice-cream respectively. During pregnancy, 21.6% avoided papaya and 12.6% avoided pineapple. For infants, 2% avoided mango and ice cream was avoided by 1% for the infants. These are common practices in many families in the southern part of India. The beneficial effects were highlighted by some of the families. One third families told that tender coconut and lemon had beneficial effects of decreasing body temperature, while 47% of the people said other beneficial effects like prevent chicken pox, rich in vit.A, iron, increases Hb level, etc.

During summer season, 37.66% of the people avoided chicken, 26.6% avoided mango and 20% of the people avoided brinjal. During rainy season, 29.3% avoided curd, 20.6% avoided buttermilk, and 22.3% avoided ice cream which was cold. During pregnancy, 21.6% avoided papaya and 12.6% avoided pineapples which are hot foods. 2.3% avoided bottle gourds which are cold. For infants, 2% avoided mango and hot foods. Ice cream was avoided by 1% for the infants. For children, 7.6% avoided mango and other fruits were avoided by 5.6%. In cold foods, Ice cream was avoided by 8% and ice water was avoided by 5%. 33.3% families told that cold food items like tender coconut, lemon had beneficial effects of decreasing body temperature, while 47% of the people said other beneficial effects like prevent chicken pox, rich in vit.A, iron, increases Hb, etc.

Table 1. Perception of hot or cold foods as ill effects by the families

Hot food items	Num(%)	Cold food items	Num(%)
Gastrointestinal tract	223(74.3)	Fever	181(60.3)
Genitourinary tract	73(24.3)	Respiratory illness	220(73.3)
Dermatology	78(25.9)	Others	73(24.3)
Others	120(40)		

Table-2. Practice of avoiding food by families

	Hot food items	Num(%)	Cold food items	Num(%)
1.Summer	Chicken	113(37.6)	Ice water	4(1.3)
	Brinjal(Egg Plant)	60(20)		
	Mango	80(26.6)		
	Others	52(17.3)		
2.Pregnancy	Papaya	65(21.6)	Spinach	5(1.6)
	Pineapple	38(12.6)	Banana	7(2.3)
	Others	29(9.6)	Others	15(9)
3.Infants	Mango	6(2)	Ice-cream	3(1)
			Others	5(1.6)
4.Winter			Curd	98(32.6)
			Ice-cream	67(25.6)
			Ice water	64(21.3)
			Others	91(30.3)

Table-3 Beneficial Effects as perceived by the families in the study area

Effects	Num(%)
Decrease in body temperature	100(33.3)
Others	141(47)

CONCLUSION

There is misconception and misunderstanding that food items cause beneficial and ill effects. Community should be periodically educated about the myths of ill effects of hot or cold food items.

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