

Short Communication

Impacts of fast–food habit on human and environmental health and economic sustainability



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ABSTRACT

The objectives of present study was to conduct a preliminary survey on various aspects of fast–food habit in order to draw a picture on its impacts on human and environmental health as well as to find how fast–food habit effects the economic sustainability. The survey was conducted in Purba Medinipur West Bengal. (Latitude 21.8°N and Longitude 87.8°E), India considering the youth populations habituated with fast and normal food habits using a questionnaires prepared considering the human and environmental health as well as economic aspects of fast–food. The results of survey work revealed that fast–food has significant adverse impacts on human and environmental health and also negatively effects on economic status of peoples in the area surveyed.

1. Introduction

Food habit and its nutritional impacts are essentially a great concern in any organism for their growth, development, population, community structure etc. Food and food habit are one of the prime factors for regulating the human health condition. Besides, adverse health impact of various food habits [conventional food habit, fast–food (Fig. 1) habits, etc.] is commonly well known facts and important concern, since it is responsible for causing various health problems, such as obesity, sugar, blood pressure, cardiac and liver diseases, etc (Bowman and Vinyard 2004, Bowman 2004; Rosenheck 2008; Anand 2011). It has documented that fast–food is recognized as one of the contributors to increased population rates of obesity in last few decades. The 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, sodium, as well as low and poor in other nutritional qualities, for example, protein, fibre, calcium, iron, etc.

Prospective data from Western countries have revealed that there is a positive association between frequency of fast–food restaurant use and weight gain. Hence, as Western fast–food companies are expanding in developing countries such as India, there is a considerable concern that such countries are in danger of succumbing to the same obesity trends as in the Western countries.

However, the present study categorized food habits in two groups, normal or conventional food habit (herein commonly called as food habit of home made foods prepared from fresh and natural products having high nutritional/food value) and fast–food habit (it is referred to food habit of costly ready made food prepared by mixing chemical based ingredients, preservatives, high sugars, various spices, etc. along with basic foods to create flavour, spicy, tasty & delicious properties without considering nutritional properties and human health impacts, for example, noodles, chāu-mèing, ramen, pizza, burger, etc.) in order to convenience of study. In this respect, thus, fast–food is supposed to be costly with lower nutritional value compared

to that of normal food. Stemming from the above problems of fast-food habits, the present study has attempted to conduct a preliminary survey on various aspects of fast-food habit in order to draw a picture on its human and environmental health impacts as well as to find how food habit associated with economic sustainability.



Fig. 1 A set of decorative fast-food served by mixing the different other food ingredients

2. Methods

To achieve the above objectives, the study was conducted in Purba Medinipur West Bengal. (Latitude 21.8°N and Longitude 87.8°E), India considering the youth populations habituated with fast and normal food habits following flow chart (Fig. 2). A questionnaire was prepared based on normal and fast-food habit and its impacts on human and environmental health in order to conduct survey and collect relevant data of different variables. The survey of fifty pre-identified samples in population of selected study area was conducted with a set of these questionnaires. The collected data was analyzed by percentage quantification of variables and a simple production cost analysis of normal and fast-food habits was done using the EXCEL programme.

3. Results and discussion

The results of survey revealed that about fifty percentage (50%) of investigated peoples fond of/prefer fast-food and a gradual increasing trend was found in fast-food habit. The highest percentage (54%) of investigated fast-food liking peoples prefers noodles, chāu-mèing, ramen, pizza and burger like fast-foods, whereas remaining percentage of peoples prefer the other fast-foods in the present survey. The survey demonstrated that most of the fast food habituated peoples are suffering by various health problems, such as – obesity, blood sugar level, blood pressure, cardiac and liver diseases. The fast-food is too costly compared to that of the normal food. Survey documented that the wastes generated from different steps of production process of both foods are generally discharged into the environment.

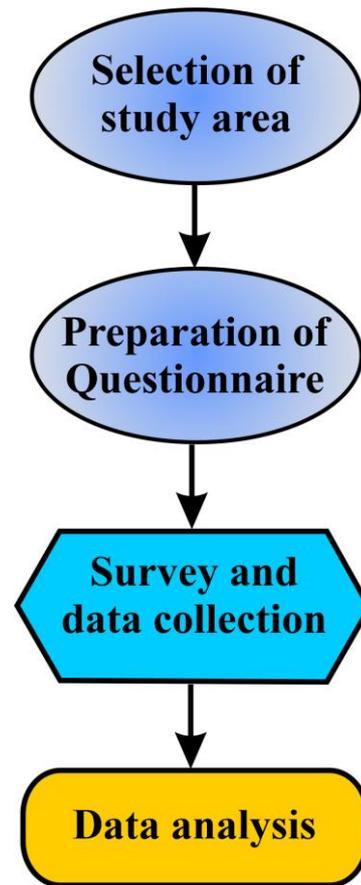
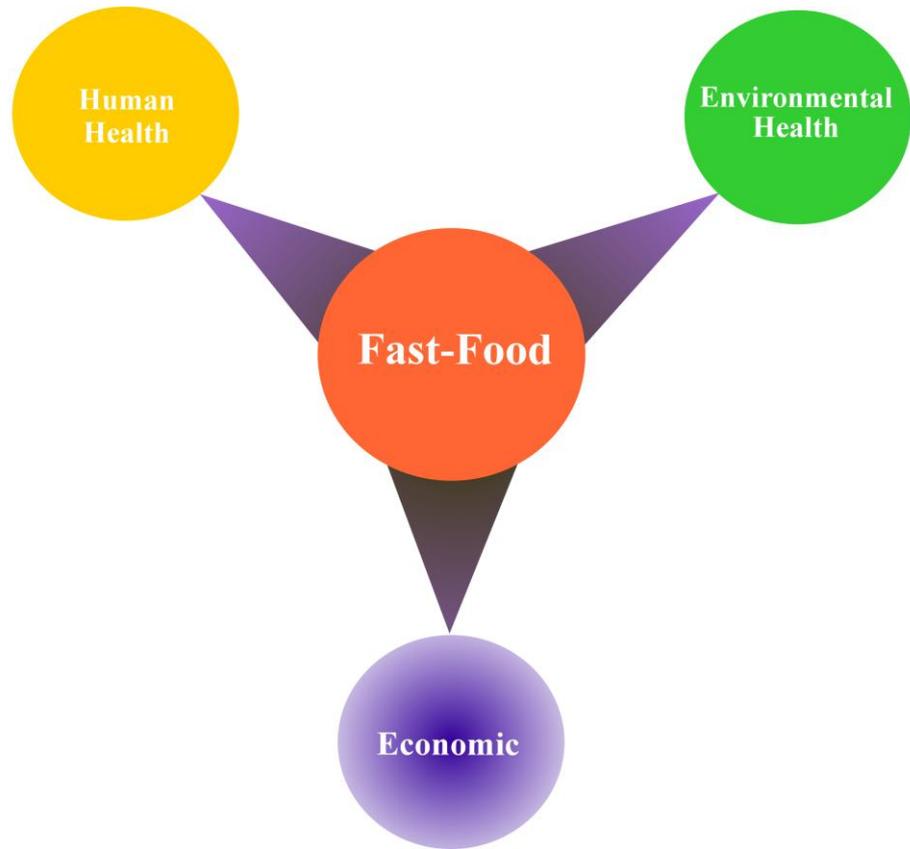


Fig. 2 Flow chart of survey work followed in present study

Since, fast-food habit is showing a gradual increasing trend, therefore, it is obvious that the culture of fast-food habit gradually and partially replacing the traditional/normal food habit among busy community of peoples, students and youths due to modernization of our society. Consequently, it has supposed that the fast-food habit is one of the other factors responsible for causing various above mentioned health impact in the recent years (Bowman and Vinyard 2004, Bowman 2004; Rosenheck 2008, Anand 2011). It can be predicted that the fast-food habit would be appeared as an immense human health problem in near future. It is also obvious that the fast-food produces qualitatively and quantitatively higher amount of wastes and utilizes high amount of energy compared to normal food, because fast-food contains various health hazardous chemicals (Sharma 2015) and excessive amount of required components (such as preservatives, vinegars, high amount of fats and sugar, etc.) as ingredients and includes additional steps in production process before human consumption (Fig. 2). Fast-food exhibits many effects like food allergies, food intolerance, cancer, multiple sclerosis (MS), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), brain damage, nausea, cardiac disease among others have been reported (Inetianbor, 2015). In this respect, fast-food is less eco-friendly or may be not eco-friendly because it is responsible for damaging the environment (<http://www.onegreenplanet.org/animalsandnature/10-ways-fast-food-is-destroying-the-world/>), although it is conducive in respect to save time in busy world. Due

Fig. 3 Adverse impacts of fast-food in three dimensions: human and environmental health and economic condition



to high cost (<http://www.businessinsider.in/Spending-only-125-on-food-last-month-showed-me-that-fast-food-is-deceptively-expensive/articleshow/49251089.cms>), the fast-food habit may create an extra financial burden on the consumers, which poses an adverse impact in economic sustainability at different levels in the investigated area, since the ingredients responsible for increasing the cost of fast-food is not native resource of the investigated area.

4. Conclusion

Summarily, it can be concluded that although fast-food is favourable in saving time of fast world, it has significant adverse health, economic and environmental impacts. Therefore, these factors should be considered in fast-food utilization for protecting human and environmental health as well as developing economic sustainability especially in India like developing country.

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