



## AWARENESS ABOUT FOOD LABELLING AMONG THE SCHOOL TEACHERS OF DAVANGERE CITY

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### ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Food Labelling serves as a primary link of information between the manufacturer and consumer. Though food labelling provides the characteristics of the food product, food marketing has become a risk factor for malnutrition especially in developing countries. Advertisements through television, internet have a major influence on purchasing food products. **Objectives:** To determine level of awareness about food labels on packaged foods and to enlist the reasons for not checking food labels on packaged foods among school teachers of Davanagere city. **Methodology:** A cross sectional questionnaire-based study conducted on all the high school teachers of Davanagere city. The purpose of the study was explained and oral consent was obtained from the participants before enrolling them in the study. Teachers were given a pretested questionnaire in English or Kannada according to their choice. The questionnaire sought information on socio-demographic characteristics and their knowledge regarding food labelling. The data was entered in excel and frequency percentages were calculated. Results are represented graphically. **Results:** A total of 496 (M – 74%, F – 26%) study subjects were included in the study. Nearly 50% checked food labels while purchasing. Date of manufacture (87%) and expiry date (85%) and price (78%) were the most commonly checked information on the labels. Lack of time (63.3%) and trust on the brand (47.5%) were the main reasons for not checking the food labels. **Conclusion:** A majority of the study subjects (48%) found important to check food labels before purchasing. The most commonly checked information was price (90%). Lack of time (63.3%) and trust on the brand (47.5%) were the main reasons for not checking the food labels.

**KEYWORDS :** Food labelling, teachers, awareness, packed food

### INTRODUCTION:

*"The past of eat is 'ate' and the future of 'ate' is 'weight' and people realise when it is late"*

Nutritional labelling is an attempt to provide consumers, at the point of purchase, with information about the nutritional content of individual food products, in order to enable consumers to choose nutritionally appropriate food. It has been one of the major instruments in trying to bring about healthier eating pattern.<sup>1</sup> The expanding world economy has resulted in an increase of national and international trade of packaged foods. Trends in society have an influential effect on consumer choice and demand. Healthy living is a term frequently used, with the benefits of exercise, a healthy diet, reduction of alcohol and stress management continuously stressed by experts in the fields of nutrition and medicine. Life expectancy has increased and people want to lead an active and healthy lifestyle in the latter part of their lives.<sup>2</sup>

Over the past 20 years, there has been a rise in consumption of packaged foods in developing countries such as India.<sup>3,4</sup> In the current scenario, when there are shifts from homemade to packaged foods, food labeling could serve as a population-based approach to help consumers make healthy choices.<sup>5-7</sup>

Regulations in India make it mandatory for food labels to display nutrition information along with the manufacturing, expiry date and best before dates as well as ingredients; creating awareness about the use of label information among consumers to enhance their skills in choosing healthy foods.<sup>8-11</sup>

However, research on nutrition labelling formats is relatively scarce and virtually, there is no insight into how labelling information is used in a real world buying situation and how it will affect consumer's dietary patterns. Also that, the nutrition labelling in India is at evolutionary stage and data on user friendliness of these labels are scanty.

The key objective of a food label is to provide information for the consumer, help sell the product and assist the consumer in making comparable food choices.<sup>12</sup> With this background, this study was carried out to determine the level of awareness on information provided on the labels of packaged foods.

### Objective:

1. To determine level of awareness about food labels on packaged foods.
2. To enlist the reasons for not checking food labels on packaged foods among school teachers of Davanagere city.

### METHODOLOGY:

A cross sectional study was conducted among high school teachers from June to August 2019. Total of 59 schools (Government, private unaided and private aided) were selected taking prior permission from the school authorities. Necessary permission from Deputy Director of Public Instruction, Block Education Officer and School heads was obtained before conducting the study. Ethical clearance was obtained from Institutional Ethics Committee. Written informed consent was taken from all the participants of the study. Tool - A pretested semi-structured questionnaire was administered and responses were collected.

### Statistical Analysis:

The data was entered in excel sheet and represented in frequencies and percentages.

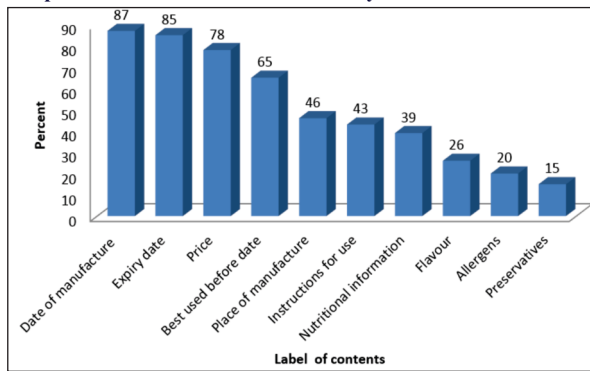
### RESULTS :

A total of 496 participants were selected. Among them 74% and 26% were males and females respectively. 94%, 4% and 1% were Hindus, Muslims and Christian respectively. Majority of the teachers were in the age group of 50-60 years (37%). Major proportion of the schools selected were of Government (64%), followed by aided (19%) and private (17%).

Among the participants, 95% purchased one or the other packed food products. Majority of the school teachers in our study purchased biscuits (71%), followed by milk (70%), water (40%), sugar (37%), snacks (28%) noodles (27%), fruit juice (23%), savouries (21%), jam (20%), pickles (19%) and ketchup (14%).

Food symbols awareness was high with ISI symbol (94%), followed by AGMARK (35%) and FPO (29%).

**Graph 1: List of label contents checked by Consumers**



**Table 1: Awareness of nutritional labelling among participants**

Variables	Response	n (%)
Frequency of checking food labels	Always	238(48)
	Sometimes	248(50)
	Never	10(2)
Idea about nutritional information	Per 100gm/100ml	288(58)
	Per weight of the product	124(25)
	Not sure	84(17)
Rules regarding nutritional information display	Mandatory*	382(77)
	Not mandatory	54(11)
	Not sure	60(12)
Colour code for vegetarian packaged food	Green*	332(67)
	Don't know	164(33)
Colour code for non-vegetarian packaged food	Red	343(69)
	Brown*	87(17)
	Don't know	79(16)
Importance of food labels in choosing product	Always useful	308(62)
	Sometimes useful	183(37)
	Not useful	5(1)
Total		496

\*Correct answer

**Table 2: Reasons for not checking labels on packaged foods**

Variables*	n (%)
Lack of trust	66(13.3%)
Use of technical terms	105(21.2%)
Crowded information	116(23.3%)
Small font size	145(29.2%)
Trust on brand	236(47.5%)
Lack of time	314(63.3%)

\*multiple choices

**DISCUSSION:**

According to our study, 95% of the study participants purchased one or the other packed food products which is similar to a study conducted by Bandara BC et al., where 98% of the study participants tend to purchase the packed food.<sup>13</sup> In a similar study in UP, frequency of purchasing packaged food was more among the participants. Majority of them checked expiry date (90%), manufacturing date (73%), price (78%) which is quite similar to our study<sup>14</sup>. In a study conducted by Archana Singh et al., consumers consulted labels mostly as assistance in purchase decisions for price comparisons, expiry date<sup>2</sup> which is quite less when compared to our study. In our study 48% of the participants mentioned that they always read food labels before purchasing, where the results are similar to the study conducted by Archana Singh et al., where 43% of the participants always read food labels at the time of purchase.<sup>2</sup>

Specific information about the nutritional information in the packed food was checked by 16% of the study participants which is around 58% in our study<sup>7</sup>. In one of the study conducted by Bandara et al., the results clearly indicated the consumers purchasing decision is more towards health consciousness. According to the results, the promising opinions of respondents on existence of food labels were to know the expiry date (80%), to know the nutritional composition 74% and 41 %

of respondents consider labels as a legal requirement.<sup>13</sup> Most consumers reported occasionally they read food labels, always (30%), some say they read it often (22%) rarely by 7.5% and 20% of them said that they never read food labels.

Date labels (99.5%) was found to be the information consumers most seek on any packaged food, followed by ingredients(78%), health claim (67%) and nutritional information 65%.<sup>9</sup> There is a great tendency of consumers use of food labels and thus influence or change their purchasing decision which is similar to our study.

Most consumers claimed to look at nutrition labels often or at least sometimes. Some claimed that looking at labels influences their purchases especially for unfamiliar food. Available evidence suggests that consumers who do look at nutrition labels can understand some of the terms used but are confused by other type of information.<sup>9</sup>

Among those who do not check food labels the most common answer given for not checking the food labels was lack of time and trust on brand. A similar study conducted in Uttar Pradesh reported that brand, MRP and taste are the criteria which make them buy the packed food without checking the labels.<sup>14</sup>

**CONCLUSION:**

The results clearly indicated that 48% of the consumers were aware about the nutritional labelling which in turn may help in their purchasing decision and also help them to buy the right product for their consumption. Date of manufacture, expiry date and price were the common information checked on the labels. Lack of time and trust on the brand were the main reasons for not checking the food labels.

**Recommendation:**

As teachers can teach the students at a very right age, all teachers should be thought regarding the nutritional labelling and its importance so that they can teach the children and in-turn children can teach their families.

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