

A Study of Meat and Processed Meat Consumption Patterns among Sri Lankan Undergraduates

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Abstract

Protein malnutrition remains a challenging and unresolved health issue among youth in Sri Lanka. This study investigated the socio-demographic factors influencing meat and meat product consumption among undergraduates in Sri Lanka to identify the factors affecting their protein intake. A total of 437 undergraduates in 18 Sri Lankan universities were interviewed via a Google questionnaire of the surveyed students, 90.8% reported consuming meat and processed meat products, while the remaining 9.2% did not. Broiler chicken meat was preferred by 98.5% of those who consume meat, followed by pork (22.2%), mutton (14.1%), beef (13.1%), and other meats (5.8%). The majority purchased meats from supermarkets (73.0%), followed by retail shops (70.3%), farms (14.6%), and households (5.8%). Over half (53.3%) were unaware of a person's daily recommended protein requirement. Considering the processed meat products in Sri Lanka, sausages (90.7%) were the most consumed processed meat product, followed by meatballs (69.3%), nuggets (23.3%), and other products, including ham and bacon (16.8%). The most common reasons for not consuming meat were lack of preference (72.5%), religious beliefs (25.0%), no reason (22.5%), health risks (10.0%), and allergies (2.5%). Among non-meat consumers, primary protein sources were plant-based foods (70.0%) and milk (70.0%), followed by eggs (55.0%), and fish (42.5%). Preferences, health considerations, and religious beliefs emerged as key factors influencing meat consumption patterns among Sri Lankan undergraduates. These findings suggest the need for nutritional interventions, such as educational seminars, dietary counseling services, improved dining hall options, and healthy eating campaigns within university settings. Finally, these programs can improve to enhance students' nutritional knowledge and well-being.

Keywords: *Consumption pattern, Meat, Processed products, Purchasing patterns, Undergraduates*