FAST FOOD AND OBESITY IN INDIA

Ms. Chaitali Bhattacharya[*]

Abstract

With the touch of globalisation and for a variety of economic and social reasons such as low cost, convenient and time-saving, people are inclining more on food prepared outside the home as a source for take-away and away-from-home consumption than in the past. Food from fast-food restaurants and away-from-home food consumption style has become trendy, tend to be energy-dense or high in calories and fat; and are associated with poorer nutritional value. As a consequence, a major problem in the society is widening like an epidemic, i.e., obesity in people, especially in children. Previously it was mainly a problem in America and other western countries, but nowadays many Asian countries like Japan, China and India are also suffering from this disease. By creating awareness and taking precautions by the people and government of India we can get recovered from this disease in recent future.

[*] PhD Scholar- Management, Noida International University, Greater Noida, U.P., India under the guidance of Dr. Mamta Singh, Asst. Professor-Noida International University, Greater Noida, U.P., India

1. Introduction:

Definition of "Fast Food": "Fast Food" is the term given to food that can be prepared and served very quickly. While any meal with low preparation time can be considered to be fast food, typically the term refers to food sold in a restaurant or store with low quality preparation and served to the customer in a packaged form for take-out/take-away. Fast food is usually processed and prepared in a standardised industrial manner with standard ingredients, cooking and production methods. Fast food is differentiated from other types of food away from home by its fast and immediate service to customers. Bender and Bender have defined fast food as a "general term used for a limited menu of foods that lends itself to production-line techniques; suppliers tend to specialize in products such as hamburgers, pizzas, chicken or sandwiches". The term fast food was first recognized in a dictionary by Merriam-Webster in 1951, the year when the first Jack in the Box restaurant was opened in San Diego.

Eric Schlosser in his book 'Fast Food Nation' argues that the "whole experience of buying fast food has become so routine, so thoroughly unexceptional and mundane, that it is now taken for granted, like brushing your teeth or stopping for a red light. It has become a social custom as American as a small, rectangular, hand-held, frozen, and reheated apple pie."

In India, the market leaders in fast food industry are Pizza Hut, McDonalds, KFC and Café Coffee Day, Wendy's and Dunkin' Donuts. Fast food meals are not only convenient, they are often very cheap. The fact that fast food is cheap and quick is no coincidence. It is hard to avoid being drowned into the world of fast food. Young Indian consumers visit fast food outlets for a change in food variety and to have a good time usually socializing with peers.

2. Statement of the Problem:

Food diversity in India is reflective of the diverse cultural background in India. Traditionally Indians prefer to consume home cooked food which is accepted to be superior and purer than food away from home. According to a study by Anita Goyal and N P Singh[14], "increasing awareness and influence of western culture has caused shift in food consumption patterns among urban Indian families. Since liberalization of the Indian economy in the early 1990s many foreign fast food companies have entered the Indian markets which has caused a significant change in the lifestyles and the food preferences of Indians." Fast food has gained popularity and wide acceptance in the Indian market after the multinational fast food players began customizing their product offering to suit Indian tastes. The MNC fast food companies began offering vegetarian meals and selected non-vegetarian options excluding beef and pork from their menu. With the economic development, western culture, the foreign fast food companies have brought a heart breaking problem, i.e., Obesity. Due to the low cost, convenient, time saving and trendy, people specially the children and adolescents are falling in the trap of eating out fast food.

3. Objective of the Study:

The objective of this study is to establish the relationship between the fast food and obesity in India.

4. Research Methodology:

This study is purely based on the secondary data taken from various related research papers, news paper articles and data from internet. This research is descriptive and analytical.

5. Reasons of Fast Food Companies to Grow in India:

The main reason behind the success of the multinational chains is their expertise in product development, sourcing practices, quality standards, service levels and standardized operating procedures in their restaurants, a strength that they have developed over years of experience around the world.

Role of Women: Females have started working outside, they are equally busy like men and so they don't have the time for cooking food. Fast food is an easy way out because these can be prepared easily.

Customer Sophistication and Confidence: Consumers are becoming more sophisticated now. They do not want to prepare food and spend their time and energy in house hold works. They are building their confidence more on 'ready to eat and easy to serve' kind of foods.

Value of Time: People have no time for cooking because of emergence of working women and also number of other entertainment items. Most of the time either people work or want to enjoy time with their family.

Double Income Group: Emergence of double income group leads to increase in disposable income. Now people have more disposable income so they can spend easily in fast food and other activities.

Large Population: India being a second largest country in terms of population possesses large potential market for all the products/services. This results into entry of large number of fast food players in the country.

Relaxation in rules and regulations: With the economic liberalization of 1991, most of the tariff and non tariff barriers in India have been are either removed or minimized. This helped significantly the MNC's to enter in the country.

Low cost, Convenient and Time Saving: Getting fast food is very convenient and easy. People can opt for fast food as take –away, home delivery or drive-through sitting in a car. It is low cost than the home-made or nutrition traditional food and it saves one's time.

6. <u>Discussion:</u>

<u>**Relationship Between Fast Food And Obesity:**</u>

Today's environment plays a major role in shaping the habits and perceptions of common people. The prevalence of television commercials promoting unhealthy foods and eating habits is a large contributor. Today more money is spent on food outside home, at restaurants, cafeterias, pubs, etc. In addition, when people eat out they tend to eat a larger quantity of food (calories) than when they eat at home. Fast food is usually high in fat and calories, and several studies have found associations between fast food intake and increased body mass index, weight gain and obesity. Fast food consumption is also related to insulin resistance and type II diabetes, heart attack, another major worldwide public health threat.[3]

Beverages such as carbonated soft drinks and packed juices also largely contribute to the obesity epidemic. It is not uncommon for a bottle of soft drink to be marketed contains approximately 400 calories. Packed drinks, juice, fruit drinks present another significant problem. These beverages contain a significant amount of calories and it is estimated that people who are currently overweight are overweight due to excessive caloric intake from beverages. Fast foods are high in unhealthy fats, sodium and sugar. Most fast foods are just opposite of healthy foods. Fast foods are high in trans fats, sugar and sodium, which can lead to obesity, heart disease and diabetes among other health problems. Healthy foods, by contrast, are high in vitamins, minerals, healthy fats and protein, and they promote energy, good health and longevity.

According to the American Psychiatric Association, the nutrients present in fast food, the characteristics of fast food consumers or the presentation and packaging of fast food may encourage substance of dependence. The fast food meals accompanied by soda increases the sugar content by 10-fold. As the Caffeine is a "model" substance of dependence, coffee drinks are driving the recent increase in fast food sales. Obesity is characterized by resistance to insulin, leptin and other hormonal signals that would normally control appetite and limit reward. Obese individuals meet criteria for psychological dependence. Finally, fast food advertisements, restaurants and menus all provide environmental cues that may trigger addictive overeating. [1]

"It's not by chance that countries with the highest obesity rates and fast food restaurants are those in the forefront of market liberalization, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand and Canada, versus countries like Japan and Norway, with more regulated and restrictive trade policies. Countries that have resisted culture of fast food-such as Italy, Spain and France- obesity is a not much of a problem. Since the 1980s, since the usher of

trade liberalization policies that have indirectly promoted transnational food companies the rates have tripled or quadrupled. There is no biological, genetic, psychological or community level factor that can explain this. Only a global type of change can explain this", said Roberto De Vogli, associate professor in the U-M School of Public Health, and lead researcher of the study. New research from the University of Michigan suggests obesity can be seen as one of the unintended side effects of free market policies.[2]

The variables identified in the relationship between fast food and obesity can be categorised such as income, income inequality, urban areas, motor vehicles and internet use per capita.

Fast food is normally high in calories which results in eating too much calories. It can lead to an extra weight gain and ultimately obesity. Research has revealed that people having habit of eating fast food consume more calories as compared with people who are not used to of eating fast food. People, fond of eating fast food, most of the time, also consume extra fat, sodium and saturated fat, while consuming less fruits, milk and vegetables.

Research evidence implicates consumption of energy-dense fast food in the obesity epidemic. The fast foods with high-fat may be in the forms of tacos or burritos; hamburgers of cheeseburgers; fried chicken or fried fish; hot dogs, franks, or bratwurst; cold cuts or lunch meats; pizza; fries or onion rings; potato chips, corn chips or popcorn; ice cream of milk shakes; and doughnuts, pastries, cake or cookies.

People these days' lead busy on-go lives; therefore, fast food restaurants provide a more feasible option, a better option, and cheaper options for low-income families. People who live in low-income household can't afford organic food which is healthy, pesticide free but slightly costly. Fast food restaurants are inexpensive and convenient, yet they cause many diseases including the biggest problem facing society today: **Obesity**.

Eating out may lead to overconsumption and increase the risk of obesity in part because of larger portion sizes, high–energy-dense foods, and increased variety and preferred taste of the foods. If a person has more than 27 percent of BMI (Body mass index) then he/she would be considered obese. According to the centre for Disease Control and prevention (CDC), obesity in adults has increased 60 % for the last twenty years, and obesity amongst children has tripled in the past thirty years. It is a clear that fast food restaurants are the biggest problem when it comes to obesity. So fast foods restaurants should start sell good-quality food to consumers to control the risks of obesity in the upcoming future.

People barely know the real truth behind fast food restaurants. When it comes to fast food restaurants, "McDonald's" has the highest sell growth each year around the world. The dark side of "McDonald's" is that they use toxic substances in their foods that are potentially harmful. According to a CNN Health article, "American McNuggets (190 calories, 12 grams of fat, 2 grams of saturated fat for 4 pieces) contain the chemical preservative tBHQ, tertiary butyl hydroquinone, a petroleum-based product. They also contain polydimethylsiloxane, an anti-foaming agent, also used in Silly Putty." The polydimethylsiloxane may cause serious health problems, and polydimethylsiloxane is illegal in every other nation in the world. There is no doubt that these kinds of chemicals are causing terrible diseases amongst us; nevertheless, fast food restaurants such as "McDonald's" are using it in their products. "McDonald's" is not the only restaurant that uses this kind of chemical though. There are more restaurants out there that are using terrible chemicals in their food products.

7. Suggestions:

The availability of healthier side dish options include: fruit (either without added fat or sugar, or 100% fruit juice); vegetables that are either steamed/roasted or not fried; potatoes that are baked, no fat added, or available with low-fat options; soup identified as low-fat or reduced sodium; baked chips; salads with low-fat dressing; corn without fat or without sauce; or chilli with lean meat or turkey.

Today, the knowledge of organic foods is expanding; however, it is not very much available in every food store, most likely due to the cost of these organic products. Organic foods are quite expensive when compared to the processed food that fast food restaurants are providing to their consumers. A person from low income group would pick fast food restaurants to survive.

Therefore, fast food restaurants should sell foods without chemicals and pesticides to prevent spreading diseases to their customers. Therefore, the person who is eating fast food would have a much lower risk of disease or obesity from these products. Processed foods are more likely to cause obesity than whole foods because fast foods have more calories and preservatives and they are causing type 2 diabetes and many others diseases.

The easy accessibility and lack of healthy alternatives make it all too easy to fall into the cycle of unhealthy eating. The lack of nutrition labels on fast-food products leaves the consumer in the dark about what he or she is actually consuming. The government should make it mandatory for the fast food companies to mention on the labels of the products about the nutritional value, trans-fat content, details of the chemical used, its side effects, types of colour, etc. While restaurants in New York and Switzerland have been banned from serving dishes that have high levels of trans fats, there are still plenty of everyday foods that are stealthily hiding the destructive ingredients.

Fast food outlets in India target children's as their major customers. Fast food comprises of anything that is quick, tasty, convenient and fashionable. It seems to have engulfed every age; every race. Wafers, colas, pizzas and burgers are suddenly the most important thing. The fast food companies lure children directly through advertisements by famous celebrities or cartoon characters. They introduce varieties of things that attract the children's attention and by targeting children they automatically target their parents because children are always accompanied by their parents. It is their social responsibility that any celebrity or institution should not endorse or be a part of such type of promotional campaigns which hazard public health.

A Monthly Double-Blind Peer Reviewed Refereed Open Access International e-Journal - Included in the International Serial Directories
Indexed & Listed at: Ulrich's Periodicals Directory ©, U.S.A., Open J-Gage, India as well as in Cabell's Directories of Publishing Opportunities, U.S.A.
International Journal of Marketing and Technology
http://www.ijmra.us

107

8. Conclusion:

We can conclude that fast food has direct effect on obesity, and as such it is pertinent to oppose the growth of unhealthy and traditional food chains. People should buy food from the outlets selling healthy substitutes. Moreover, the dilemma should be taken up by the governments of the countries to ban every type of advertisement promoting foods those are high in sugar and fat, especially to the children and should take necessary steps to face this problem successfully.

9. References:

1. *"Is fast food addictive?"*, Garber AK, Lustig RH 2011 Sep;4(3):146-62.
2. Ann Arbor, Mich., University of Michigan, http://www.sph.umich.edu/
3. *"Neighbourhood fast food environment and area deprivation – substitution or concentration?"*, Published online in 'Appetite' on 29th December 2006
4. Image: iStockPhoto
5. Image :Media
6. Brindal E, Mohr P, Wilson C, Wittert G: "*Obesity and the effects of choice at a fast food restaurant"*, Obesity Research & Clinical Practice 2008, **2:**111-117.
7. *"The relation between dietary change and rising US obesity"*, Binkley J, Eales J, M J, International Journal of Obesity 2000, **24:**1032-1039.
8. *"Fast food: friendly?"*, Rice S, McAllister EJ, Dhurandhar NV, International Journal of Obesity 2007, **31:**884-886.
9. *"Focusing on fast food restaurants alone underestimates the relationship between neighbourhood deprivation and exposure to fast food in a large rural area"*, Joseph R

Sharkey**,** Cassandra M Johnson**,** Wesley R Dean **and** Scott A Horel**,** Nutrition Journal 2011, **10**:10 doi:10.1186/1475-2891-10-10

10. **"*Availability of Healthier Options in Traditional and Non-traditional Rural Fast-Food Outlets*",** Creel JS, Sharkey JR, McIntosh A, Anding J, Huber JC,
    BMC Public Health 2008., 8(395)

11. "*Weight Status and Restaurant Availability - A Multilevel Analysis*", Neil K. Mehta, MSc, Virginia W. Chang, MD, PhD; http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2007.09.031

12. **"*Healthy Food vs. Fast Food*"**, 2009**,**by Clay McNight , Demand

13. "*Junk-food-really-DOES-mess-brain-Research-shows-trans-fats-causes-brain-damage*", http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2081079/.html#ixzz325vuqQ5w

14. "*Consumer perception about fast food in India: An exploratory study*", Goyal, Anita & Singh, N P. British Food Journal, 109, 2, 2007, pp. 182-195.