

DIETARY HABITS AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AMONG YOUTH IN DUHOK, IRAQ

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ABSTRACT

Background: Unhealthy dietary habit and physical inactivity are associated with higher risks for chronic morbidity and premature mortality. The objective of this study is to determine the prevalence and types of dietary habits and physical activity among youths in Duhok Governorate, Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

Methods: A cross-sectional study was conducted from September 2020 to January 2021 in Duhok Governorate. Systematic random sampling was used to select 729 youths (15-24 years-old), who visited Premarital Screening and Counselling Health Clinic in Duhok city. Data collection was done using questionnaires developed based on the WHO STEPwise approach to Non-Communicable Diseases surveillance.

Results: A total of 729 youth (366 males and 363 females) were interviewed, Fruit, vegetables, dairy products, and sugar-sweetened soft drinks consumption four and more times per week was (68.1%, 79.2%, 65% and 70.8) respectively, while fish consumption was (4.4%) ≥ 2 /week. More than half (55.8%) didn't meet the WHO physical activity recommendations.

Conclusions: Unhealthy dietary habits and low physical activity is highly prevalent among youths in Duhok.

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Keywords: *Dietary habit, Duhok, Physical activity, Youth.*

Y outh health remains a challenge with estimated over 1.5 million deaths globally in 2019. Limited physical activity and increase in body weight at early age, are associated with lifetime health consequences, heavy economic tolls, and higher risks of non-communicable diseases¹⁻⁵.

Dietary habits' changes among adolescents toward Western style energy-dense fast-food snacks, less fruit/vegetables, and sugar-sweetened beverages, are associated with higher risk of obesity and overweight compared to traditional food patterns⁶. Also, 69% of adolescents, while watching television or screens, always eat snacks,

usually high-energy snacks⁴.

WHO recommends a healthy diet to be balanced and contain 400 grams of fruits and vegetables (excluding potatoes), energy from fat to be < 30 % and from free sugar < 5 %, and < 5 grams of salt per day^{2,7}. The estimates for Iraq and Eastern Mediterranean countries are: 312 grams of fruits and vegetables for males (15-29 years-old) and 348 grams for females per day, compared to 423 grams for males and females in European countries with very low child and adult mortality^{8,9}.

Physical activity in the forms of bodily aerobic and musculoskeletal stretching that involve energy expenditure, whether

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during leisure, at home, transport or as part of work performed by a person, has numerous significant positive health gains for body, heart, and mind; it contributes to the management and prevention of non-communicable diseases like cancer, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease; enhance learning, thinking, and judgment skills; and could avert up to five million deaths annually in the world¹⁰. Physical activity is one of the very important actions that an individual can take regardless of age to promote normal development and growth, sleep, work and feel better and reduce the risk of most chronic non-communicable diseases¹¹.

For healthy adults (18-64 years-old), WHO recommends at least 150–300 minutes of moderate-intensity, or at least 75–150 minutes of vigorous-intensity aerobic physical activity; or an equivalent combination of both throughout the week. While, for healthy children and adolescents (5-17 years-olds), WHO recommends at least an average of 60 minutes per day of moderate- to vigorous-intensity physical activity, mostly aerobic, across the week¹².

Increase use of technology, economic development, urbanization, and changes in transportation means with cultural norms, influence the level of physical activities¹³.

Worldwide in 2016, the prevalence of inadequate physical activity among school students (11-17 years-old), was very high (81%) (girls 84.7% and boys 77.6%), with the rates in low-income countries being the highest's¹⁴. Sedentary life behaviours with less physical activity among children and adolescent, leads to weight gain, reduced duration of sleep and poorer health, fitness, cardiometabolic and social behaviours¹⁰. The aim of this study is to determine the prevalence and types of dietary habits and

physical activity among youths in Duhok Governorate, Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

METHODS

A cross-sectional survey was done in Duhok Governorate, located northeast of Iraq across the border with Turkey and Syria, with mountainous and agricultural landscape, and is part of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. From September 2020 to January 2021, systematic random sampling was used to select eligible youth (15-24 years old) as study participants, verbal consent was taken from participants. Among selected eligible youth, 5% refused to participate in this study. Ethical approval was obtained from Research Ethical Committee of Directorate General of Health, Duhok, IRAQ. (Reference no. 29052018-4).

Inclusion criteria: youth aged 15 to 24 years-old, both males and females, attending the Premarital Screening and Counselling Health Clinic in Duhok, and accepted to participate in this study.

Exclusion criteria: youth younger than 15 and older than 24 years old, were excluded from this study.

Data were collected, at the Premarital Screening and Counselling Health Clinic in Duhok city, which is the main clinic providing daily services for young couples from across Duhok Governorate, using standardized questionnaire forms designed based on WHO STEP-wise approach to Non-Communicable Diseases (NCD) surveillance¹⁵. The questionnaires included consent, background, and socio-demographic information; diet and daily dietary consumption habits; daily vigorous and intermediate intensity physical activity; and sedentary lifestyle. Physical activity that causes large increases in

breathing or heart rate were classified as vigorous-intensity activity, while those causes small increases in breathing or heart rate as moderate intensity physical activity. The study data were entered into Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and analysed with the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26, to measure the required frequencies, rates, and proportions. Pearson chi-squared test was used to measure associations between variables and considered statistically significant if the p-value was less than 0.05.

The number of minutes performing physical activity per week, for each youth, were calculated multiplying the number of days by the time spent conducting such physical activity. WHO recommended 75 minutes per week threshold was used for vigorous intensity physical activity, and 150 minutes per week for moderate intensity physical activity. Youth's, didn't attained any of these two criteria's, were classified as not meeting WHO recommendation for physical activity and as inactive.

RESULTS

A total of 729 youths (15-24 years old), (366 males and 363 females) were interviewed. Fruit and vegetable consumption, ≥ 4 /week was 68.1% and 79.2% respectively, while 28.3% had ≥ 4 meals outside home per week (males 29.4% and female 27.2%). About two third, (65.0%) eat dairy product (males 62.4% and females 67.6%), 18.8% red meat, and 25.4% chicken ≥ 4 /week, while 4.4% eat ≥ 2 /week fish.

One in four participants (24.8%) (males 25.8% and females 23.8%), have ≥ 4 istikan/cups (locally used 30 cc) of tea per day, with 56.8% adding ≥ 2 spoons of sugar to a cup of tea, and 70.8% drinks ≥ 4 /week sugar sweetened soft drinks cans. Almost two third (64.0%), (males 60.4% and females 67.6%), have breakfast ≥ 4 /week. There was no statistically significant difference among male and female participants in regard to food consumption habits (Table-1).

Table 1: Frequency of diet consumption per week, by gender

Frequency per week		Male n=364		Female n=361		Total n=725		P value*
		No.	(%)	No.	(%)	No.	(%)	
Fruits	≥ 4	253	(69.5)	241	(66.8)	494	(68.1)	0.473
Fruit serves (day)	≥ 1	352	(96.7)	348	(96.4)	700	(96.6)	0.822
Vegetables	≥ 4	286	(78.6)	288	(79.8)	574	(79.2)	0.715
Vegetable serves (day)	≥ 1	364	(100.0)	361	(100.0)	725	(100.0)	NA
Eat out of home	≥ 4	83	(22.8)	96	(26.6)	179	(24.7)	0.263
Eat out last week	≥ 4	107	(29.4)	98	(27.1)	205	(28.3)	0.511
Dairy product	≥ 4	227	(62.4)	244	(67.6)	471	(65.0)	0.161
Red meet	≥ 4	76	(20.9)	60	(16.6)	136	(18.8)	0.154
Chicken	≥ 4	95	(26.1)	89	(24.7)	184	(25.4)	0.670
Fish	≥ 2	16	(4.4)	16	(4.4)	32	(4.4)	1.000
Cup of tea (day)	≥ 4	94	(25.8)	86	(23.8)	180	(24.8)	0.548
Spoon of sugar added to	≥ 2	200	(54.9)	212	(58.7)	412	(56.8)	0.330

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Frequency per week	Male n=364		Female n=361		Total n=725		P value*
	No.	(%)	No.	(%)	No.	(%)	
tea							
Soft drink ≥ 4	254	(69.8)	259	(71.7)	513	(70.8)	0.569
Glass of milk ≥ 4	42	(11.6)	38	(10.5)	80	(11.1)	0.722
Breakfasts ≥ 4	220	(60.4)	244	(67.6)	464	(64.0)	0.053

* Chi-Square

Very few (4.3%) always added salt or salty pickles to food before eating, while 56.4% never add additional salt to food. Processed food high in salt were often ate by 11.3%, (males 12.8% and females 9.7%). Less than half (46.6%) of youths, (males 43.6% and females 49.4%), stated that lowering salt in diet is not important at all. While more than one third (36.5%)

thinks that too much salt or salty sauce, and 39.9%, (males 43.4% and females 36.3%) too much sugar or sweets in diet, could cause a health problem. 35.0% of youths, limit consumption of sweets on a regular basis to control sugar intake, while 11.6%, looks at the sugar and calories contents/label of food (Table-2).

Table 2: Salt and Sugar consumption and attitude

	Male n=364		Female n=361		Total n=725		P value*
	No.	(%)	No.	(%)	No.	(%)	
Always Add salt or a salty pickle to food right before or as eating	15	(4.2)	16	(4.5)	31	(4.3)	0.170
Often Eat processed food high in salt	46	(12.8)	35	(9.7)	81	(11.3)	0.131
Lowering the salt in diet is not important at all	157	(43.9)	177	(49.4)	334	(46.6)	0.110
Think that too much salt or salty sauce in diet could cause a health problem	140	(39.1)	122	(34.0)	262	(36.5)	0.121
Think too much sugar or sweets in diet could cause a health problem	158	(43.4)	131	(36.3)	289	(39.9)	0.083
Limit consumption of sweets on a regular basis to control sugar intake	124	(34.1)	130	(36.0)	254	(35.0)	0.319
Look at the sugar or calories content on food labels a regular basis to control sugar intake	45	(12.4)	39	(10.8)	84	(11.6)	0.295

* Chi-Square

Walking or biking, ≥ 150 minutes /week, was the most common physical activity (48.1%), (males 76.5% and females 19.6%). 11.4%, (males 22.4% and females 0.3%), do vigorous, and 44.2% moderate intensity physical activities work, while 9.7% do vigorous, and 6.7% moderate

intensity sports, ≥ 75 minutes per week. Males were more engaged in vigorous and moderate intensity physical activities at work, sport, and fitness or recreation activities, than females, with statistically significant association (p-value <0.001). More than half (55.8%) didn't meet WHO physical activities recommendations.

While 94.8 sleeping \geq 7 hours/day, and 63.5% sitting or reclining \geq 3 hours /day

(watching TV, reading a book, and/or playing with mobile) (Table-3).

Table 3: Physical activity by gender.

Physical activity per week	Males n=366		Females n=363		Total n=729		P Value ***
	No.	(%)	No.	(%)	No.	(%)	
VIA* work \geq 75 min	82	(22.4)	1	(0.3)	83	(11.4)	<0.001
MIA** work \geq 150 min	208	(56.8)	114	(31.4)	322	(44.2)	<0.001
Walk or bicycle \geq 150 min	280	(76.5)	71	(19.6)	351	(48.1)	<0.001
VIA* sport \geq 75 min	67	(18.3)	4	(1.1)	71	(9.7)	<0.001
MIA** sport \geq 150 min	47	(12.8)	2	(0.6)	49	(6.7)	<0.001
Don't meet WHO recommendation	158	(43.2)	249	(68.6)	407	(55.8)	<0.001
Sleeping \geq 7 hours / day	346	(94.5)	345	(95.0)	691	(94.8)	0.868
Sitting \geq 3 hours / day	231	(63.1)	232	(63.9)	463	(63.5)	0.878

* Vigorous Intensity Activity, ** Moderate Intensity Activity, *** Chi-Square

DISCUSSION

Fruits and vegetables consumption \geq 4 times/week among youth (15-24 years old) in Duhok was high (68.1%), this is close to the reported 58.6% among adolescent in Syria¹⁶, but higher than Sudan and Egypt, 30.1% and 29%, respectively. Female fruits consumption \geq 4 times/week (66.8%) was higher than the 11.8% in Kuwait, 16.2% in Palestine and 46.3% in Iraq¹⁷. While vegetable consumption \geq 4 times/week, was very common (79.2%), higher than the reported among adolescent in Syria, Sudan and Egypt, 46.3%, 63.9% and 78.1%, respectively^{17,16}.

Dairy product consumption \geq 4 times/week was high (66.6%), this is close to the reported 65.0% among adolescents in Syria¹⁶, but higher than the 58.1% and 58.9% in Sudan and Egypt¹⁷.

Chicken was consumed \geq 4 times /week more than red meat, 25.4% vs 18.8%. Red meat consumption is lower than, Bahrain

20%, Iran 31.9%, and Jordan 47%, but less than Palestine 16%¹⁷. But fish meat consumption was very low, 4.4% \geq 2 times /week, lower than among adolescents in Sudan, Jordan, and Syria, 11.4%, 54% and 6.3% respectively,^{17,16}.

One in four (24.8%) of youth drink \geq 4 istikan/ cup of tea daily, this is equivalent to about 160 grams of tea per day, which higher than the 47.9 grams in Greece and 56.3 grams in Turin-Italy, but less than 229.9 and 927.8 grams in Copenhagen and United Kingdom respectively¹⁸.

Sugar-Sweetened- Beverage (SSB) drinking \geq 4 times/week was very common (70.8%), higher than the 22.2%, 24.0%, 48.8% and 43.4% among adolescent in Syria, Palestine, Qatar and Sudan, respectively^{17,16}. With average 250 ml size of each SSB can, and 10.6 grams of sugar /100 ml content labelled, each SSB can contains 26.5 grams of sugar, and this alone is more than the 5% (equivalent to

25 grams) of total daily calories intake recommended by WHO⁷.

Processed food high in salt, were often eaten by 11.3% of youth in Duhok, less than the reported among adults (15-29 years-old) in Turkey 33.6%, Egypt 21.7% and (18-39 years old) in Iraq 23.3% 19-21. Lowering salt in diet was thought not at all important by 46.6% (male 43.9% and female 49.4%); this is much higher than 17.8% among 15-29 years adult in Egypt²¹. More than half of the participants (55.8%) did not meet the recommended 150 to 300 minutes of moderate, and/or 75 to 150 minutes of vigorous physical activities per week by WHO 10. This is higher than 42.8% among Iraqi adults²⁰, close to the 57.3% of inactive (6-13 years-old) student in Erbil city²², and 55% among Australian adults 23, but less than the 70% among (16-18 years-old) students in Erbil city²⁴, 85.1%, 82.9%, 87%, and 81% among adolescent in Iraq, Lebanon, Qatar, and globally, respectively¹⁴.

This study didn't measure the weight of food contents consumed daily, but rather collected information on the frequency of consumption, therefore it was not possible to compare the quantity of the consumed fruits and vegetables with the recommended 400-500 gm per day by WHO for adolescent². Other limitation was due to Covid-19 pandemic, it was not possible to conduct the study at high schools and universities as planned. In the other hand, selecting the study sample at the obligatory premarital health screening and counselling clinic was a strength.

In conclusions, fruits, vegetables, and sugar-sweetened-beverage (SSB) consumption was high, while fish meat consumption was very low. Physical activity is low among youth in Duhok. Efforts should be made on the individual,

community, and government levels to enhance healthy eating habits and increase physical activity.

Conflict of interest

The Author(s) declare(s) that there is no conflict of interest.

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پوخته

تیتالین خوارنی و لیفینین جهستهی دناق گه نجادا ل دهوکی، هه ریما کوردستانا عیراقی

پیشهکی و نارمانج:

تیتالین خوارنی یین نه ساخلم و نه لیفینا جهستهی دگریداینه ب زیده بونا مه ترسیین نه خوشیین دومدریژ و مرنا پیش وهخت هه. نارمانجا فی هه کولینئی، دیارکرنا ریژه و جورین تیتالین خوارنی و لیفینین جهستهی دناق گه نجادا ل دهوکی، هه ریما کوردستانا عیراقی

ریکین هه کولینئی:

ئه هه کولینه یا دووبه ره کی بوو کو ژئیلونا ۲۰۲۰ تا کانوونا دووی ۲۰۲۱ ل پاریزگه ها دهوکی هاتیه نه جامدان. شیوازی هه ره مه کی یی ریکن یخستی هاتیه بکارئینان بوو ده ستینیشانکرنا ۷۳۹ گه نجا (دژیی ۱۵-۲۴ سالیدا) (۳۶۶ نیر و ۳۶۳ می)، یین سه ره دانا کلینیکا پشکین و راویژا پیش ماره برینئی ل باژیی دهوکی کرین. پیزانین هاتینه کومکرن ب بکارئینانا پسارین هاتینه دانان له سه ره بنه مایین ریکارین "پینگاف ب پینگاف" بوو دووی فجونا نه خوشین نه هه گوهاستی یا ریکخراوا ساخلمیا جیهانی هه.

ئه نجام:

خوارنا فیقی، زهرزه واتی، به ره مه یین شیری، و هه خوارنیین غازی یین شرینکری ب شه کری، جار جارا یان زیده تر ده فته کیدا (۱، ۶۸٪، ۲، ۷۹٪، ۶۵٪، و ۸، ۷۰٪) بوو لدویف ئیک، لی خوارنا ماسی (۴، ۴٪) دوو جارا یان زیده تر ده فته کیدا بوو. پتر ژنیفی (۸، ۵۵٪) نه گه هشتنه پیشنیازین ساخلمیا جیهانی هه بوو لیفینین جهستهی.

ده ره نجام:

تیتالین خوارنی یین نه ساخلم و کیمیا لیفینین جهستهی گه له ک دبه ره لافن دناق گه نجا و سنیله یان ل دهوکی.

الخلاصة

العادات الغذائية والنشاط البدني لدى الشباب في دهوك ، العراق

الخلفية والأهداف:

ترتبط العادات الغذائية الغير صحية وقلة النشاط البدني بمخاطر أعلى للإصابة بالأمراض المزمنة والوفيات المبكرة. الهدف من هذه الدراسة هو تحديد مدى انتشار وأنواع العادات الغذائية والنشاط البدني بين الشباب في دهوك ، إقليم كردستان العراق.

طرق العمل:

كانت هذه دراسة مقطعية أجريت في الفترة من أيلول (سبتمبر) 2020 إلى كانون الثاني (يناير) 2021 في محافظة دهوك. تم استخدام اسلوب العينات العشوائية المنهجية لاختيار 729 شابا (15-24 عاما) (366 ذكرا و 363 أنثى)، الذين زاروا عيادة الفحص والاستشارة قبل الزواج في مدينة دهوك. تم جمع البيانات باستخدام الاستبيانات التي تم تطويرها على أساس نهج منظمة الصحة العالمية التدريجي لترصد الأمراض غير المعدية.

النتائج:

كان استهلاك الفاكهة والخضروات ومنتجات الألبان والمشروبات الغازية المحلاة بالسكر أربع مرات فأكثر في الأسبوع (68.1% ، 79.2% ، 65% و 70.8) على التوالي، بينما كان استهلاك الأسماك (4.4%) مرتين أو أكثر في الاسبوع. أكثر من النصف (55.8%) لم يفوا بتوصيات منظمة الصحة العالمية بشأن النشاط البدني.

الاستنتاجات: العادات الغذائية الغير صحية وقلة النشاط البدني منتشرة بنسبة عالية بين الشباب في دهوك.