

Research Paper :

Awareness of women consumers regarding food safety

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ABSTRACT

The study was conducted by selecting 120 women consumers of Jorhat to find out the awareness of women consumers regarding food safety. It was found that 46% of women consumers had low level of awareness, 42% had high level of awareness and only 12% had medium level of awareness.

Key words : Women consumers, Food safety, Adulteration, Standards marks, Brand name

Good health is of paramount importance for every individual. The intake of appropriate and adequate food and their effective utilization by human body is seen as the cornerstone of human growth and development. But it is estimated that seven million people a year are affected with food borne illness of which almost 700 have proved to be fatal. Thus, safety of food quality must be given special attention. The aspects are many and various, including but not limited to additives, residues, contaminants, product tampering, nutritional properties and microbial contaminations.

Safety is a judgment of the acceptability of a risk, which itself is a measure of the probability and severity of harm to human health. A food or a substance in a food can be considered safe if its risk are judged to be acceptable (Bajaj and Anand, 2002). Thus, safety of food is an assurance that food will not cause any harm to the consumers when it is prepared or consumed according to its intended use (Prakash and Bajaj, 2000).

The problem of food safety is increasing with development and modernization. Each year, the world's population grows by about 90 million people. Industrialization is the only solution to it. Food production and processing are among the industries that are growing, as a result of which small scale food producers and cottage industries usually out in large scale, commercial producers and processors. At times, they are identified to be the sources of environmental pollution and unsafe food, since they lack adequate facilities and knowledge to produce foods that are safe and of acceptable quality. Traditional practices passed down through generations are the only guidelines for food preparation.

With modernization, the demand for street or rather fast food stalls is mushrooming at such a rate that water

supplies and waste disposal are not sufficient. Moreover, there has been a rapid development in food production, processing and distribution system and techniques. Initially the processing of food was done at cottage or community level. However, with changing socio, cultural and economic scenario, there has been an apparent shift in the food habits, resulting in demand for highly processed foods involving sophisticated technology. A wide range of products such as canned products, both vegetative and animal origin, nutritious foods, fast foods, beverages and organic foods are being produced in the country and the industry has diversified tremendously in the past few decades.

Because of complex, present day food production and distribution system, it is impossible for the consumer to rely on self protection. Consumer protection is necessary to prevent injury to health and to prevent the consumer from being deceived as to the nature, quality or value of the food. There exists a host of food safety and fraud matters, such as natural and man made toxic substances in food, nutritional components of food adulteration, microbiological and chemical contamination causing human illness, misleading presentation and advertising and so on. Keeping these points in view, the investigator was interested to know the awareness of women consumers of Jorhat regarding food safety.

METHODOLOGY

The present study was conducted upon 120 women consumers of Jorhat town of Assam. A two stage stratified random sampling method was adopted in order to select representatives samples of the study. The municipality area of Jorhat was divided into four parts North East, North West, South East and South West. For

selection of household, a list of ward along with numbers of house was collected and from each part one ward was selected randomly and from each ward 5% of the household constituted the total size of the sample. The data were collected through personal interview with the help of pre-tested interview schedule. The data were tabulated and analyzed using scores, mean, standard deviation and standard error. Level of awareness was categorized as:

- Score $>$ Mean + $1.96 \times S.E$ High level awareness
 Score in between mean + $1.96 \times S.E$ and Mean - $1.96 \times S.E$ Medium level awareness
 Score $<$ Mean - $1.96 \times S.E$ Low level awareness

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings were described on the basis of income as low income group (LIG), medium income group (MIG) and high income group (HIG).

Awareness of women consumers regarding food contamination and food borne illness:

It is evident from Table 1 that majority of women consumers (64.17%) had high level of awareness regarding food borne illness and food contamination. It was also observed that most women consumers (47.22%) of low income group had low level of awareness as compared to middle income (15.78%) and high income group (6.52%) women consumers. The percentage of homemakers who had high level of awareness belonged to HIG (89.13%) and MIG (63.16%). The results could be attributed to the fact that with increase in income of homemakers they were frequently involved in household purchasing and were more educated also.

Table 1 : Awareness of women consumers regarding food contamination and food borne illness

Level of awareness	LIG N ₁ =36		MIG N ₂ = 38		HIG N ₃ = 46		Total N = 120	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
High	12	33.33	24	63.16	41	89.13	77	64.17
Medium	7	19.44	8	21.05	2	4.35	17	14.17
Low	17	47.22	6	15.78	3	6.52	26	21.67

Analysis of Table 2 revealed that about 36.67 per cent of the respondents had low level of awareness regarding the common adulterants mixed in basic foodstuff irrespective of their income group. It was mainly due to the fact that although the women consumers knew that food stuffs can be adulterated but they had a very little

Table 2 : Awareness of women consumers regarding common adulterants mixed in basic foodstuffs

Level of awareness	LIG N ₁ =36		MIG N ₂ = 38		HIG N ₃ = 46		Total N = 120	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
High	8	22.22	12	31.58	16	34.78	36	30.00
Medium	15	41.67	11	28.95	14	30.43	40	33.33
Low	13	36.11	15	39.47	16	34.78	44	36.67

awareness regarding the common adulterants that can be used to adulterate food stuffs. Among the LIG, it was seen that 41.67% had medium level of awareness, 39.47% had low level of awareness among MIG and there was equal distribution of respondents (34.78%) in HIG who had both high and low level of awareness regarding common adulterants mixed in basic food stuffs.

In respect of awareness regarding various incidents related to adulteration (Table 3) it was revealed that half of the women consumers had high level of awareness regarding various incidents of adulteration in India. It was followed by 30 per cent low awareness and 20 per cent had medium awareness.

Table 3 : Awareness of women consumers regarding various incidents of adulteration in India

Level of awareness	LIG N ₁ =36		MIG N ₂ = 38		HIG N ₃ = 46		Total N = 120	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
High	10	27.78	20	52.63	30	83.33	60	50.00
Medium	14	38.89	6	15.79	4	8.70	24	20.00
Low	12	33.33	12	31.58	12	26.09	36	30.00

About 83.33% in the high income group were highly aware about the various incidents of adulteration in India. This may be due to the fact with the increase in income, women consumers were more exposed to mass media.

From Table 4, it was disappointing to note that about 51.67 per cent of women consumers had low level of awareness regarding Consumer Acts like Food and Cosmetics Act, Food Product Order and Prevention of Food Adulteration Act and Standard Marks like Agmark

Table 4 : Awareness of the women consumers regarding Consumer Acts and Standard Marks like Agmark, ISI, etc.

Level of awareness	LIG N ₁ =36		MIG N ₂ = 38		HIG N ₃ = 46		Total N = 120	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
High	3	8.33	14	36.84	17	36.96	34	28.33
Medium	3	8.33	8	21.05	13	28.26	24	20.00
Low	33	91.67	17	44.74	12	26.08	62	51.67

and ISI etc. The percentage of women consumers having high level of awareness in low income group was 8.33 per cent, 36.84 % in the middle income group and 36.96 in high income group. Majority (91.67%) of the respondents in the low income group had a low level of awareness.

Similar study by John (1999) revealed that about 70 % of the respondents of Nilampur town have heard of ISI, Agmark and FPO and 18.51 % of the respondents of Edakkora Panchayat had heard these.

In respect of awareness regarding importance of inspecting colour (Table 5) it was revealed that maximum number (64.17%) of the respondents had high level of awareness, followed by 18.33% having medium awareness and 17.5 % having low level of awareness.

Table 5 : Awareness of women consumers regarding the importance of inspecting colour

Level of awareness	LIG N ₁ =36		MIG N ₂ = 38		HIG N ₃ = 46		Total N = 120	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
High	8	22.2	32	84.21	37	80.43	77	64.17
Medium	15	41.67	3	7.89	4	8.70	22	18.33
Low	13	36.11	3	7.89	5	10.87	21	17.50

A perusal of Table 6 indicates that only 39.17% of the respondents had high level of awareness regarding the importance of Regd. No., packaging and brand name in the label. About half of the population of high income group had high level of awareness where as in low income group and middle income group about 22.22 % and 42.11% respondents had high level of awareness.

Table 6 : Awareness of women consumers regarding importance of Regd. No. packaging and brand name in the label.

Level of awareness	LIG N ₁ =36		MIG N ₂ = 38		HIG N ₃ = 46		Total N = 120	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
High	8	22.2	16	42.11	23	50.00	47	39.17
Medium	-	-	9	23.68	5	10.67	14	11.67
Low	28	77.78	13	34.21	18	39.13	59	49.17

An overall picture of awareness of women consumers regarding food safety indicates that about 46% of the total respondents have low level of awareness and

about 42% have high level of awareness regarding food safety. Thus, it can be seen that there is almost an equal distribution of respondents having low and high level of awareness. About 12% of the respondents have medium level of awareness (Fig.1).

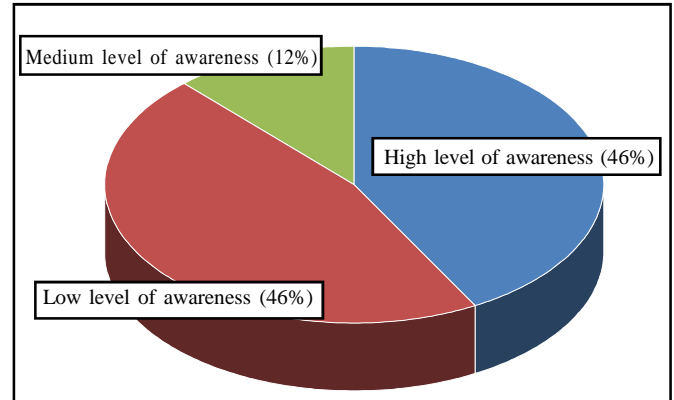


Fig 1 : Awareness of women consumers regarding food safety in Jrhat Town

Conclusion:

The present study revealed that there is a need to create awareness regarding food safety especially among the low income group. Food control agencies should concentrate on consumer education to raise the level of awareness. Moreover consumer organizations and NGOs can guide consumers on important issues regarding food safety.

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