

NUTRITION KNOWLEDGE, PERCEPTION AND USE OF HEALTH-RELATED LABEL AMONG HOUSEHOLDS IN ACCRA

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INTRODUCTION

The extant literature on consumer food labelling use showed limited data on health-related information use (HIU) aspects of labels. Therefore, this study investigated nutrition knowledge, perception and use of health-related information on pre-packaged foods among households in Accra

METHODS

A structured questionnaire assessed consumers' (510 respondents) food label use, perceptions, understanding of health-related label information (Nutrition Facts label, food claims, ingredient lists and serving sizes) and socio-demographic variables.

RESULTS

Majority of respondents perceived that health-related information on pre-packaged food products were truthful and accurate. Approximately, one-third of them use food labels in their purchase decisions. In assessing nutrition-related knowledge of food labels, 72% of respondents reported they had adequate nutrition-related knowledge of food labels (subjective knowledge) but 34.7 % have adequate nutrition knowledge based on an objective assessment.

Perceived inability, shopping behavior and absence of need were reasons for non-label use. Label users consulted labels mainly to ascertain product safety and less of nutrition and health reasons. In a multiple linear regression analyses the following variables: level of education, individuals with food allergies, those who had a previous education on the use of labels, those who perceived labels are easy to understand and individuals who self-reported adequate food label understanding showed positive association with HIU.

Table 1. Predictors of health-related use (HIU) index^a among food label users(N=162)

Predictor	Coefficient (β)	Mean (SD)	Standard error	95% CI
Education	0.51 *	-	0.22	0.074 – 0.95
Food allergy status				
No	Ref	9.0(3.09)		
Yes	1.23 *	11.7(4.80)	0.61	0.03-2.43
NCD status				
Absent	Ref	9.2(3.24)		
Present	-0.029	8.9(3.71)	0.61	-1.23 – 1.18
Understanding of information on pre-packaged food				
Difficult to understand	Ref	10.5(3.33)		
Easy to understand	1.35 ***	7.7(2.62)	0.38	0.61 – 2.09
Do not know	0.28	7.7(1.93)	0.51	-0.73 – 1.28
Education on food label use				
No	Ref	8.7(2.96)		
Yes	0.80 *	11.0(3.72)	0.39	0.038 – 1.55
Nutrition-related knowledge of food labels				
	-0.011	-	0.011	-0.033 – 0.0094
	-0.0059	-	0.014	-0.033 – 0.021
Nutrition knowledge(self-report)				
Not sure	Ref	7.5(2.9)		
Poor	-0.77	6.9(2.39)	0.88	-2.51 – 0.96
Intermediate	-0.044	8.9(2.69)	0.81	-1.64 – 1.55
Very well	1.18	12.1(3.99)	0.96	-0.72 – 3.08
Understanding of food labels(self-report)				
Not sure	Ref	6.9(1.89)		
Poor	0.41	7.2(2.59)	0.62	-0.90 – 1.63
Intermediate	1.35 *	9.2(2.82)	0.56	0.26 – 2.44
Very well	2.41 **	12.2(3.63)	0.75	0.93 – 3.90

^aHIU index was formed using the frequency of ingredient lists, health or nutrition claims, serving size and nutrition facts table use aspects of food labels. The frequency was measured on 5-point Likert scale from never (1 point) to always (5 points). Therefore, the sum of responses ranges from 4 to 20. Median (25th-75th percentiles): 9 (7-11)

CONCLUSION

Though consumers had a positive perception of health-related label information usage was low. This suggests most consumers lacked understanding of health-related label information. Efforts towards promoting consumer use of labels are recommended.



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