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Challenges in consumer behavior change based on color coding system for beverages as a non-communicable disease control mechanism

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Statement of the Problem: The Sri Lankan government has introduced a mandatory color coding system for sugar levels in carbonated soft drinks, nectars, fruit juices, and ready serve drinks (except milk drinks) since 2016 as a control mechanism for non-communicable diseases. The level of awareness of color coding system among the population appears to be low, and behavior changes in consumption of beverages based on the color coding system also appears to be low. The state sponsored awareness programs on the regulation also have been low except at the initial introduction. The objective of this study was to find the level of awareness of color coding system for beverages, and changes in consumption of beverages due to color coding system among the population.

Method & Theoretical Orientation: A survey was carried out using convenient sampling, across population in several districts in the country. The study also included in-depth interviews.

Findings: Majority of respondents knew about the color coding regulation on sugar levels for beverages, but no one knew different beverage types the regulation was applicable. Only 40% had learnt of the regulation from newspapers or television. Nearly 50% of respondents had not changed consumption behavior towards beverages since implementation of the color coding system. But about 80% respondents believed that a color coding system is helpful to maintain population's health, and they were looking forward to a color coding system on other food products too.

Conclusion & Significance: A regulation such as color coding system is not fully capable of bringing in consumer behavior change in consumption of beverages. More consumer centric grass root level educational activities are required to enable consumer behavior change. Recommendations are made to have public awareness programs to educate the public on non-communicable diseases and the relationship with energy intake from food.

Biography

Sujeewa Gunaratne has her expertise in food and oral health product regulatory activities and food safety. Her dedication for food safety has enabled her to conduct several awareness programs for food industries on food regulations, food borne diseases, pest management, good regulatory review practices for industry etc., engaging state health regulators and private sector stakeholders as speakers. She believes in creating an enabling environment where industry can align with mandatory food regulations, assuring food safety for consumers.

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