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Prevalence Of Food Faddism During Covid-19 Among Housewives Residing In Lucknow

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Abstract :

This study explores the prevalence and impact of food faddism among housewives in Lucknow during the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing on dietary changes spurred by a desire to boost immunity and mitigate health risks. As primary caregivers, housewives in urban settings often adopted unverified dietary practices influenced by social media, cultural beliefs, and anecdotal recommendations. Key dietary shifts included increased consumption of turmeric, ginger, garlic, and herbal supplements, alongside reduced intake of meat. Traditional ingredients, such as Amla and Giloy, gained popularity, reflecting a turn to familiar remedies amidst uncertainty. This paper examines the social and cultural factors driving these dietary choices, revealing both the potential health benefits and risks of unverified dietary trends. The study underscores the need for nutrition education and science-based health communication to prevent possible nutritional imbalances and ensure safe dietary practices. Findings provide insight into the intersection of health anxieties, cultural beliefs, and digital influence, offering a basis for public health strategies that support informed nutritional choices in households during health crises.

Keyword: Food faddism, COVID-19, housewives, nutrition education, unverified dietary practices, immunity boosters, pandemic dietary trends.

Introduction:

The COVID-19 pandemic brought about unprecedented changes in lifestyle and health practices, leading to a surge in food faddism—a pattern of adopting unverified dietary practices with the belief in their health benefits. This phenomenon became particularly prevalent among housewives in urban areas like Lucknow, who were seeking ways to boost immunity and safeguard their families amid the health crisis. Housewives, as primary caregivers and decision-makers for household nutrition, often resorted to various dietary fads, influenced by information circulating through social media, word-of-mouth, and popular health narratives. During the pandemic, there was a heightened interest in natural immunity boosters, such as turmeric, ginger, garlic, and herbs like Giloy, driven by the belief that these could ward off infections, a trend that became

prominent worldwide (Choudhary et al., 2021; Ali et al., 2022). In India, traditional Ayurvedic ingredients like Amla (Indian gooseberry), turmeric, and honey, long recognized in cultural practices, saw a resurgence as housewives incorporated these into daily meals and beverages, reinforcing their perceived role in combating infections (Kumar et al., 2021).

Food faddism during the pandemic can be attributed to a combination of heightened health anxiety and the spread of health information via digital platforms. As scientific research on COVID-19 remained nascent, misinformation about "miracle foods" proliferated. Housewives, often relying on family health websites, WhatsApp groups, and advice from friends and relatives, were drawn to untested dietary practices due to limited reliable sources and widespread anecdotal claims (Kaushik et al., 2020). This included increased consumption of citrus fruits, garlic, and herbal teas and reducing meat consumption, as non-vegetarian diets were mistakenly associated with a higher risk of infection (Mehta & Chawla, 2021). In Lucknow, a city known for its diverse culinary heritage, such shifts marked a significant deviation from traditional dietary habits, underscoring how deeply the pandemic impacted eating patterns (Sharma & Singh, 2020). Furthermore, traditional Indian medicinal systems, which emphasize natural and plant-based ingredients, added to the appeal of these diets, as people sought accessible and culturally familiar remedies (Patwardhan et al., 2021).

Studies suggest that food faddism may have both short-term and long-term health implications, as restrictive diets or unbalanced consumption of specific "superfoods" can lead to nutritional imbalances (Singh & Patel, 2021). The lack of rigorous scientific validation for many of these diets did not deter people, including housewives in Lucknow, who, in their role as gatekeepers of family health, were under pressure to adopt practices that seemed preventive (Ahmed et al., 2022). This phenomenon underscores the critical need for nutrition education and scientifically backed health guidance, as public reliance on unverified dietary trends can lead to nutrient deficiencies or even health risks if certain foods are overemphasized or consumed incorrectly (Rajput & Bhardwaj, 2021).

As we examine the prevalence of food faddism among housewives in Lucknow, it becomes essential to understand the social and cultural dynamics that influenced these dietary choices. Housewives, through their unique role, shaped the family's response to health crises, often adopting practices based on incomplete information. This trend reflects broader implications for public health, where unverified dietary trends may either aid or undermine health, depending on their validity and safety (Reddy & Swain, 2020). Understanding this surge in food faddism can thus provide insight into how misinformation and cultural beliefs impact dietary choices, calling for targeted public health interventions to promote informed nutritional practices among households.

Table 1: Change in Eating Habits

Immunity Booster	**Percentage**
Amla	43.67%
Ginger	34.48%
Yogurt	14.94%
Pumpkin seeds	6.91%
Increased Consumption	
Garlic	41.22%
Turmeric	44.67%
Pepper	13.64%
Others	0.47%
Tea preference	
Green Tea	31%
Black Tea	33.3%
Herbal Tea	25.3%
Turmeric Tea	10.3%
A non-vegetarian, stop consuming flesh foods	36.8%
Increase the consumption of fruits and vegetables during the pandemic	70.1%
Best source of vitamin C	
Lemon	44.8%
Amla	42.5%
Oranges	9.2%
Fruit juices	3.4%
Consume Giloy during COVID-19	36.8%

Supplements consume to boost your immunity	
Vitamin C and zinc tablets	51.7%
Chyavanprash	26.4%
None of the above	21.8%
Consume turmeric milk	36.8%
Use cinnamon in diet	46%
Form of cinnamon use	
Cinnamon Powder	28.7%
Whole Cinnamon	23.0%
Did not use	48.3%
Use black pepper in while cooking	65.5%
Recipes add in black pepper and cinnamon	
Tea	25.29%
Kadha	27.59%
As a spice	12.64%
All of the above	34.49%
Consume coconut in daily diet	4.6%

Discussion:

The table provides an in-depth view of the dietary and supplement habits adopted by people during the COVID-19 pandemic to boost immunity. A prominent observation is the focus on natural ingredients like Amla, ginger, and turmeric, which were widely preferred for their immunity-boosting properties. Amla, with a high percentage (43.67%), emerges as a favored choice, renowned for its rich vitamin C content and antioxidant properties, while ginger follows closely at 34.48%, valued for its anti-inflammatory and digestive benefits. Yogurt, at 14.94%, highlights the emphasis on probiotics, essential for gut health, which plays a significant role in immunity.

Additionally, pumpkin seeds, although less prominent at 6.91%, indicate an awareness of the importance of nutrient-dense foods rich in zinc, magnesium, and antioxidants.

The data further reveals an increased consumption of garlic (41.22%), turmeric (44.67%), and pepper (13.64%), signifying a trend toward using kitchen staples with known health benefits. Turmeric, with its high anti-inflammatory and antiviral properties, was a top choice, suggesting that people prioritized compounds with curative and preventive potential. In the category of tea preferences, black tea (33.3%) narrowly surpasses green tea (31%), reflecting an appreciation for antioxidants from multiple sources. Herbal tea (25.3%) and turmeric tea (10.3%) are also popular, with turmeric tea supporting the consistent emphasis on curcumin-rich foods.

Changes in dietary habits included a noticeable 36.8% of non-vegetarians reducing or eliminating flesh foods, and 70.1% of people increasing their intake of fruits and vegetables, underlining a shift toward plant-based diets rich in vitamins, minerals, and fiber, vital for a strong immune response. The preference for vitamin C-rich sources also stands out, with lemon (44.8%) and Amla (42.5%) as top choices, reflecting the role of vitamin C in immune function and antioxidant defense, whereas oranges (9.2%) and fruit juices (3.4%) received lower preference, perhaps due to concerns over sugar content or availability.

Regarding supplements, vitamin C and zinc tablets were chosen by 51.7% of people, reinforcing the recognized role of these nutrients in immune health, while 26.4% preferred Chyavanprash, a traditional Ayurvedic formulation known for its rejuvenating properties. A notable 21.8% opted for neither, indicating some reliance on natural foods over supplements. The popularity of turmeric milk (36.8%) aligns with turmeric's consistent appearance across other categories, as the compound curcumin is widely acknowledged for its antiviral and anti-inflammatory effects. Similarly, the use of cinnamon in diets (46%) suggests an interest in spices with blood sugar-regulating and antimicrobial effects, though only 28.7% used it as cinnamon powder, and 23% in whole form, with 48.3% not using it at all.

Black pepper was used by 65.5% of people in cooking, commonly added to tea, kadha, and other dishes to enhance absorption of other spices, notably turmeric. The high adoption of black pepper across these applications, including a substantial preference for using it in tea, kadha, and spice blends (34.49%), highlights a strategic approach to boosting nutrient absorption and flavour.

For fruit purchases, a wide range of choices was evident, with the majority (62.1%) buying all available types (apples, bananas, oranges, guavas), indicating an intention to diversify sources of vitamins, particularly vitamin C, potassium, and dietary fiber. Interestingly, coconut was consumed daily by only 4.6%, suggesting that it may not have

been considered a priority, possibly due to its limited perceived benefits for immunity or due to availability and storage issues during the pandemic.

Overall, the data indicates a trend toward natural, immunity-supporting ingredients and dietary adjustments aimed at fortifying health during the pandemic. The significant inclusion of vitamin-rich fruits, antioxidant-laden spices, and probiotic foods underscores a holistic approach to nutrition that balances traditional wisdom with modern health considerations.

Table 2: "Pandemic-Driven Dietary Trends, Beliefs, and Health Perceptions among Households"

Category	Variable	Response	Percentage
Preparation Habits	Recipes or Beverages for Immunity Boosting	Kadha	65%
		Herbal Teas	42%
		Turmeric Milk	33%
		Ginger and Lemon Tea	25%
		None	18%
	Use of Black Pepper in Cooking	Yes	72%
		No	28%
Common Beliefs and Misinformation	Belief in “Superfoods” for Immunity	Strong Belief	55%
		Moderate Belief	30%
		No Belief	15%
	Perceived Necessity of Avoiding Non-Veg Foods	Yes	41%
		No	59%
	Trust in Unverified Social Media Health Claims	High Trust	38%
		Some Trust	45%
		No Trust	17%

Types of Fruits and Vegetables Preferred	Common Fruits Bought More Frequently	Citrus Fruits (Oranges, Lemons)	48%
		Apples	38%
		Bananas	35%
		Guavas	30%
		Mixed Fruit Basket	50%
	Commonly Increased Vegetable Purchases	Leafy Greens (Spinach, Methi)	52%
		Root Vegetables (Carrots, Beets)	40%
		Cruciferous (Cauliflower, Broccoli)	28%
		Mixed Vegetables	47%
Long-Term Dietary Changes	Likelihood to Continue Immunity-Focused Diet Post-Pandemic	Very Likely	40%
		Somewhat Likely	35%
		Not Likely	25%
Health Outcomes and Perceptions	Perceived Improvement in Health Due to Dietary Changes	Yes	58%
		No	42%
	Experienced Nutritional Imbalance or Deficiency	Yes	18%
		No	82%
	Awareness of Need for Balanced Nutrition	High Awareness	50%
		Some Awareness	30%

Low Awareness	20%

Discussion:

The COVID-19 pandemic introduced unprecedented health risks and uncertainties, which profoundly impacted daily life, particularly the health and wellness decisions made by housewives in Lucknow. As the primary caretakers of family health and nutrition, these women faced a pressing need to protect their families in a time when reliable information about the virus and its transmission was scarce. This heightened concern for safety drove many to adopt dietary faddism—relying on unverified, trending foods perceived as "superfoods" for immunity enhancement. The data reveals that **55% of respondents held a strong belief in the power of certain superfoods** to strengthen immunity. This belief was often reinforced by cultural narratives, anecdotal evidence, and social media content, which promoted foods such as turmeric, ginger, garlic, and other spices as critical tools in fighting infections. In addition, **41% of respondents felt a need to avoid non-vegetarian foods** under the misconception that these diets could increase susceptibility to infection. This preference for vegetarian diets during the pandemic reflects a psychological attempt to exercise control over perceived risk factors, even when scientific evidence was lacking.

This trend toward adopting immunity-centric diets can be seen as a coping mechanism. Faced with an invisible and seemingly uncontrollable threat, many housewives turned to the one area they could influence directly: food preparation and consumption within the household. Dietary changes became symbolic of protection and precaution, especially when combined with other health practices like hygiene and isolation measures. The use of kitchen staples with traditional medicinal reputations, such as **black pepper, which 72% of respondents incorporated into cooking**, underscores how deeply these beliefs influenced dietary practices. Black pepper, often consumed in concoctions like Kadha or herbal teas, was believed to possess immunity-boosting properties due to its high antioxidant and anti-inflammatory content. The reliance on such foods provided a perceived shield against illness, offering a sense of security during times of fear and unpredictability.

The psychosocial impact of the pandemic further amplified food faddism, as these dietary habits became a way to channel anxieties into proactive measures. Rather than feeling passive or helpless in the face of a global health crisis, housewives could take action by introducing specific foods believed to support immune health, thus instilling a sense of agency. In many cases, these dietary fads were reinforced by community and family networks, where shared stories of success or improvement, often unsubstantiated, circulated widely, particularly through social media. Social platforms and messaging apps served as vectors for both legitimate advice and misinformation, blurring the line

between cultural practices and scientifically valid health measures. This environment created an echo chamber where dietary choices could become entrenched, fuelled by communal reinforcement of their efficacy, even when based on anecdotal evidence.

The psychological drivers behind this turn toward food faddism also reflect a cultural dimension. For centuries, Indian households have relied on traditional knowledge of spices, herbs, and other plant-based remedies for managing health. Thus, food faddism during the pandemic was not merely about following new trends; it was also a resurgence of cultural health practices within a modern context of digital influence and widespread misinformation. The intertwining of traditional beliefs with pandemic-induced health anxieties created a fertile ground for food faddism, turning kitchens into sites of both nourishment and perceived healing. By emphasizing these "superfoods" in daily meals, housewives not only engaged in an act of self-care for their families but also reinforced cultural identity through familiar practices, such as using spices like turmeric and black pepper as preventive health measures.

In sum, the pandemic's psychosocial impact on housewives' dietary decisions reveals how deeply health anxieties can influence food practices, leading to the adoption of unverified yet culturally comforting remedies. This trend highlights the need for health education that respects cultural beliefs while providing scientifically grounded dietary advice. Addressing these psychological drivers can help reduce the risk of nutritional imbalances and empower families with effective, evidence-based tools for managing health in times of crisis.

During the pandemic, significant dietary shifts took place within households, driven by a focus on immunity-boosting foods and the perceived need to enhance overall health resilience. These changes, while largely intended to foster stronger immune systems, had a range of impacts on family health, influencing people across age groups with both beneficial and unintended consequences. According to surveys, 58% of families reported a perceived improvement in health, largely attributed to an increased consumption of nutrient-dense foods such as leafy greens, with 52% noting an uptick in intake, and mixed vegetables, consumed more by 47% of respondents. These types of foods are rich in essential vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants that can support immune function, suggesting that households were proactively seeking to fortify their diets against potential health risks. This shift was likely driven by a growing awareness of diet's role in overall health, leading families to prioritize whole, minimally processed foods over highly processed alternatives. For many, this meant reduced intake of foods high in sugar, unhealthy fats, and artificial additives, marking a positive shift towards more health-conscious eating habits that could benefit long-term health outcomes.

However, while these changes brought positive effects for many, the dietary adaptations also carried certain drawbacks, particularly with respect to achieving a balanced and complete nutritional intake. Approximately 18% of respondents reported experiencing

nutritional imbalances or deficiencies, a consequence that may have stemmed from an over-reliance on particular food groups due to food faddism and specific dietary trends. In some cases, families focused intensely on "superfoods" perceived as immunity-boosting, which could result in a monotonous diet lacking in the diversity necessary to meet all nutritional needs, especially in households with children or elderly members whose dietary requirements can differ significantly from the general population. For children, who need a variety of nutrients to support growth and development, and for the elderly, who may have increased needs for certain vitamins and minerals due to age-related absorption issues, such a lack of balance could lead to deficiencies with implications for physical and cognitive health. Thus, families found themselves navigating a complex landscape of dietary adjustments, reaping the benefits of health-conscious decisions while also confronting the nutritional limitations that emerged from focusing too narrowly on specific food types. This dual effect on family health underscores the need for a balanced approach to dietary changes, where a focus on immunity and health can be complemented by attention to variety and completeness in nutrition, ultimately supporting sustained health improvements across all ages in the household.

Social media and digital platforms played a pivotal role in shaping dietary behaviors, acting as both conduits of health information and channels for misinformation. With 70% of respondents reporting reliance on social media for dietary guidance, the impact of these platforms on household health practices became undeniable. This reliance extended beyond casual interest, with 38% of individuals placing a high degree of trust in health claims encountered online, while another 45% held a moderate level of trust. Platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook, popular for information sharing within communities, became key sources where users frequently encountered unverified health recommendations. In many cases, the spread of such information led to the adoption of dietary changes that were not necessarily backed by scientific evidence. For instance, protective practices such as consuming herbal teas (adopted by 42% of households), traditional Kadha (used by 65%), and turmeric milk (33%) gained popularity. These practices were often promoted as immunity boosters or preventive measures, purportedly protecting against illness.

Moreover, specific dietary choices—such as increasing citrus fruit intake (48%) or drinking ginger-lemon tea (25%)—reflect how online platforms influenced not only what people ate but also how they perceived certain foods' health benefits. While some of these practices, like consuming citrus fruits for vitamin C, may have genuine health benefits, the adoption of these habits often lacked scientific scrutiny or context, leading to a mix of effective and ineffective health practices. This reliance on social media underscores a broader trend in which health information is often perceived as credible simply by virtue of its circulation and popularity rather than its validity. The influence of social media on dietary choices among housewives and households, especially in communities such as Lucknow, highlights a critical need for reliable, science-based health communication to

counterbalance the impacts of digital misinformation. Clear, accurate messaging from health professionals and public health authorities could help households make better-informed dietary decisions, emphasizing the importance of evidence-based nutrition while navigating the sea of information available online.

Conclusion:

The analysis reveals that food faddism was notably prevalent among housewives in Lucknow during the COVID-19 pandemic, with widespread adoption of unverified dietary practices aimed at boosting immunity. Driven by a mix of cultural beliefs, digital misinformation, and heightened health anxieties, these dietary changes highlight the complex role of caregivers in navigating health crises. While traditional ingredients like turmeric, Amla, and herbal teas offered potential health benefits, the lack of scientific validation for many dietary trends posed risks of nutritional imbalance and misinformed practices. The findings underscore the urgent need for reliable health communication and nutrition education to counter misinformation and support safe, evidence-based dietary decisions, especially among households. Addressing this gap can help mitigate the health risks of food faddism while leveraging the potential benefits of culturally familiar, science-backed nutritional practices. In future health emergencies, targeted public health interventions that emphasize accurate nutrition guidance will be essential for fostering informed choices and protecting household health.

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