Facilitators and strategies to promote whole grains among the Malaysian adult population: A theory-based qualitative study

Danaselvam UI1, Siau CS2, Mohd Sanip MNA3, Koo HC1

1 Department of Bioscience, Faculty of Applied Sciences, Tunku Abdul Rahman University College, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
2 Department of Hospitality Management, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Tunku Abdul Rahman University College, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
3 Health Education Programme, Faculty of Health Sciences, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Introduction

A substantial body of empirical studies suggest that a diet comprising of significant amounts of whole grains is associated with a lower risk of cardiovascular diseases, obesity, type 2 diabetes, and certain cancers [1]. Despite the numerous health benefits, whole grains consumption levels are reported low worldwide, including Malaysia. Data on the consumption levels among Malaysian adults is limited [1]. However, statistics from Malaysian nationally representative surveys indicated that mean intakes (measured in WG ingredients) in children and adolescents differ from approximately 2.3g/day to 1.7g/day respectively in Malaysia. Therefore, there is a need to facilitate the whole grains intake among Malaysian population [2].

This research aim to aid the in-depth exploration of the preferred strategies for promoting whole grains consumption in an effective and culturally-appropriate manner among the Malaysian adult population according to the Theory of Reasoned Action Approach (RAA) model.

Methodology

- The study protocol was approved and reviewed by the Tunku Abdul Rahman University College Research Ethics Committee (UC/I/G2021-00069).
- Questions were validated by 10 panels with nutrition credentials background.
- Individual online in-depth interview were conducted through Zoom platform.
- Each interview ranged from 60 to 85 minutes
- Participants were rewarded RM50 TNG e-wallet fund transfer as a token of appreciation
- Overall, 30 participants were recruited using purposive and snowballing sampling method.
- The inclusion criteria are as follow:
  - Aged ≥ 18 years old.
  - Food shoppers, person in charge of household and cooking at home.
- The exclusion criteria are as follow:
  - Individuals with higher nutrition education are excluded.
- NVivo Version 12.0 were used for the statistical approach.
- The interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed thematically.

Discussion

In a nutshell, the most prevalent strategy proposed were developing a whole grains cookbook (n=30, 100%); cost reduction (n=26, 86.7%); increased education (n=25, 83.3%) and awareness (n=16, 53.3%); enhanced accessibility and availability of WG (n=19, 63.3%). The least tools recommended were improving the product labelling (n=7, 23.3%); creating a habit or lifestyle that encourage consumption of whole grains in daily lives (n=7, 23.3%) and peer’s encouragement (n=3, 10%).

To our knowledge, this is the first qualitative study to provide information on strategies towards promoting whole grain consumption among Malaysian adult population. These perceived strategies were in line to the whole grain consumption strategies that were highlighted most frequently in the prior studies conducted in Western countries [3]. An additional strategic approach addressed in this data was developing Asian-inspired whole grain meals. Respondents indicated that they are accustomed to the Malaysian foods easily available to them, and that whole grains are not the norm among the general population.

Culturally-appropriate and customized resources are more likely to be followed and widely consumed. Cookbooks that have been deliberately designed can be valuable resources for boosting whole grains consumption.

Conclusion

Cookbook was perceived to be the most effective technique to facilitate and improve whole grain intake in Malaysia. We anticipate the findings of the study may assist to improve whole grain consumption among Malaysian population.

References