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Influence of the confinement during the COVID-19 pandemic on lifestyle and dietary behaviour of a group of Sri Lankans

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Travel restrictions, lockdowns, isolations and quarantine processes were implemented to reduce the spread of the COVID-19. These protective measures have altered the lifestyles and eating habits of people around the world. This study analysed the lifestyle and dietary behaviour of a group of Sri Lankans during a critical period of the COVID-19 pandemic. Sinhala and English versions of online pre-tested questionnaires were disseminated following the snowball sampling method. Data were collected from 23rd of May 2021 to 14th of June 2021 and statistically analysed. A total of 524 respondents answered the questionnaire and the majority (59.7%) were females. The respondents varied in age from 16 to 85 years and the majority (82.1%) belonged to the age range of 21 to 35 years. The most females were concerned about their diet and experienced altered appetite. Most of the respondents in the age group of 16 to 20 years experienced a higher appetite while the majority among other age groups observed no changes. More than half of the respondents (54.6%) stated that they do not consume their main meals at the same time every day. Most respondents (54.4%) reported a stable body weight. The weight changes were associated with the modifications in appetite ($P < 0.05$) and the number of times they felt hungry in a day ($P < 0.05$). Most of the respondents decreased bread (44.8%) and savoury bakery product (58%) consumption and it can be considered as a positive effect of the COVID-19 confinement. Interestingly, most of the respondents have stated that they increasingly consumed hot beverages (54.8%) and reduced the consumption of frozen and cold food (61.8%). Most of the respondents increasingly consumed homemade food (63.9%) and tried out new recipes (55.5%) while most reduced ordering of prepared food (59%). Among daily routine variations, most of the respondents slept longer (54%) and used mobile phones more (73.1%). Most respondents spent more time with family members (67.4%) and a considerable percentage of the respondents increasingly engaged in home gardening (26.3%) and reading books (31.7%), which can be considered as positive effects of the confinement. However, the engagement in physical exercises was low (51.7%). On mental health, 35.7% of the respondents experienced increased stress levels while 26.3% experienced a reduction. Among the respondents, 27.7% experienced increased anxiety and 27.9% observed reduced depressed moods. Interestingly, most of the respondents (39.9%) felt happier and more peaceful. More than half of the respondents (65%) experienced altered sleeping patterns during the confinement. More than half of the respondents (57.4%) had daytime naps. There was a significant difference ($P < 0.05$) among the age groups regarding the time of sleep. Most of the respondents within the 16 to 35 years age group went to sleep later than usual and most respondents above 46 years of age slept at the same time as before. In conclusion, this study revealed alterations in daily routine, physical exercises, engagement in recreational activities, mental health, sleeping pattern, appetite, body weight and food consumption pattern of a group of Sri Lankans during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords: COVID-19, Eating habits, Lifestyle, Lockdown, Sri Lanka