

Label-Reading Behaviors on Nutritional Health Products Among Medical Students: A Case Study

Abstract

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Introduction: Nutrition labels are an important public health tool that can help consumers make informed dietary and health-product choices. However, evidence on nutrition label-reading behaviours in Cambodia remains limited. Medical students are an important group to study because they are future health professionals and may influence health behaviours through their own practices and future patient education. This study examined label-reading behaviours, nutrition knowledge, and perceived understanding of nutrition information among medical students in Cambodia.

Methods: This pilot study used a mixed-methods design. A total of 40 medical students were recruited to complete a structured questionnaire assessing sociodemographic characteristics, nutrition knowledge, attitudes toward label reading, and self-reported label-reading behaviours. The questionnaire included multiple-choice questions, short-answer items, and 5-point Likert-scale items. Descriptive statistics were analyzed using SPSS and reported as frequencies and percentages.

Results: There was the same frequency of both male and female (n=20, 50%). The median age of participants was 21 (Min=18; Max=27). Most participants were non-chronic diseases (n=39; 97.50%), and (n=28; 70%) without consumption of any health-related products. The finding showed that most participants (n=36; 90%) had high exposure to nutrition-related information and strong motivation (n=37; 92.5%) with positive attitudes (n=34; 85%) toward label reading, and dietary supplement use (n=31; 77.5%). Although the majority demonstrated moderate nutritional knowledge (n=27; 67.50%), more than half had low perceived label knowledge (n=22; 55%) that indicated difficulty in understanding nutrition label information. Despite this, a high proportion reported practicing label reading (n=32; 80%) and positive purchasing behaviors (n=31; 77.5%). Overall, the results highlight a gap between participants' high motivation and information exposure and their limited ability to effectively interpret nutrition labels.

Conclusion: This pilot study suggests that medical students have positive attitudes toward nutrition label reading but may have limited ability to interpret nutrition information accurately. Strengthening nutrition education and label literacy may help students make more informed dietary and health-product choices and support future health-promotion roles.

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Ethics statement: We are being ethical in conducting our research; mainly, we will pay highly respect to our participants by having clear objectives in our work in order to invite and receive agreement from them to be a part of our research. We will also promise that there are not any sensitive questions that could be harmful to our participants. Especially, we will not spread any personal information that we have collected while doing a survey to the public.

Conflicts of interest: None conflict of interest to declare.

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