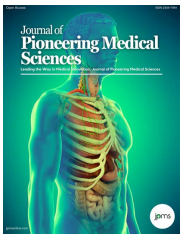
Journal of Pioneering Medical Sciences
Received October 15, 2024 Accepted December 09, 2024 Published January 05, 2025.
Volume 13, Issue 07, Pages 75-88

DOI https://doi.org/10.47310/jpms2024130713



Contaminated Consumption: Unveiling the Health Hazards of Food Adulteration and its Profound Impact on Public Health in India

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Abstract Food adulteration, the deliberate contamination or substitution of food products with inferior or harmful substances for economic gain, has become a pressing global concern with profound implications for public health. This study provides a comprehensive overview of the various forms of food adulteration, its widespread prevalence, and the significant health risks it poses to consumers. Adulteration affects a broad spectrum of food items, including cereals, spices, oils, dairy products, and beverages. The consumption of adulterated foods presents immediate dangers such as acute poisoning, as well as long-term health repercussions. Toxic substances like heavy metals, pesticides, and microbial contaminants are known to trigger gastrointestinal disorders, neurological damage, and, in some cases, fatal outcomes. Chronic exposure to contaminated food increases the likelihood of developing non-communicable diseases, including cardiovascular conditions, diabetes, and cancer. To mitigate this growing threat, it is imperative to strengthen regulatory frameworks, implement robust testing protocols, and enforce stringent penalties for offenders. Public awareness initiatives and educational programs play a pivotal role in empowering consumers to make informed choices and advocate for greater transparency in the food supply chain. In conclusion, food adulteration represents a substantial public health risk by compromising both the safety and nutritional integrity of the food consumed. This study employs a quantitative research approach, gathering data from 222 respondents in Chennai, complemented by a chronological review of existing literature on the subject.

Key Words Consumer awareness, consumer safety, food adulteration, food safety legislation, gastrointestinal illness, india, neurological disorders, public health

INTRODUCTION

Food adulteration, the deliberate inclusion of substandard or harmful substances in food for economic profit, poses a significant threat to public health and food security worldwide. This unethical practice undermines the safety, quality, and authenticity of the food consumed daily by millions. It not only jeopardizes human health but also erodes consumer trust, disrupts supply chains, and poses challenges to regulatory frameworks. The history of food adulteration is deeply intertwined with societal, technological, and economic developments, reflecting a dynamic interplay between economic motivations, technological advancements, and changing consumer behavior.

The evolution of food adulteration has been marked by a growing sophistication in techniques and methods. Historically, adulteration was often limited to the inclusion of simple substances, such as mixing chalk powder with flour or adding water to milk. However, with advancements in science and technology, adulteration has become more complex and harder to detect. Modern adulteration methods involve the use of hazardous chemicals, synthetic compounds, and advanced techniques designed to mimic the appearance, taste, or texture

of genuine food products. These developments, coupled with globalization and the expansion of food supply chains, have intensified the challenges associated with detecting and combating adulteration.

Several factors contribute to the prevalence of food adulteration, including economic incentives, weak regulatory frameworks, and consumer demand. Economic motivations often drive producers and vendors to cut costs and maximize profits by using inferior ingredients, diluting products, or substituting expensive components with cheaper alternatives. The complexity of global supply chains further exacerbates the issue, making it difficult to trace the origin of adulterated products. In many developing countries, including India, the lack of stringent enforcement of food safety laws and the presence of unregulated markets create an environment conducive to adulteration. Additionally, consumer perceptions and demand for visually appealing or low-cost products often unknowingly fuel the adulteration cycle.

India, with its diverse and vast food industry, faces significant challenges in combating food adulteration. The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) serves as the primary regulatory body responsible for ensuring food safety. Despite several initiatives to strengthen food safety regulations and enhance public awareness, enforcement remains inconsistent due to regional disparities, resource constraints, and infrastructural limitations. Common adulteration practices in India include the use of hazardous chemicals such as formalin in fish, synthetic dyes in spices, and detergents in milk. These practices not only compromise food quality but also pose serious health risks, including gastrointestinal issues, organ damage, and long-term exposure to carcinogenic substances.

In contrast, the United States boasts a more robust regulatory framework for food safety, overseen by agencies such as the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). These agencies implement stringent standards and enforcement protocols to ensure the safety of food products, with a particular focus on processed foods. While food adulteration in the United States is less prevalent compared to India, issues such as mislabeling, contamination, and fraud in high-value items like organic products and seafood persist. The United States also places significant emphasis on preventing foodborne illnesses, which are often linked to contaminated or adulterated foods.

Globalization has further complicated the issue of food adulteration by introducing new challenges and vulnerabilities. The international trade of food products has expanded supply chains across borders, increasing the risk of adulteration and contamination. Additionally, the rising demand for health-oriented products, such as organic or fortified foods, has created opportunities for mislabeling and fraud. Adulteration in high-value items, including honey, olive oil, and premium spices, has become a growing concern, as these products often command higher prices and are more susceptible to deceptive practices.

Combating food adulteration requires a comprehensive and collaborative approach. Regulatory reforms must be paired with technological advancements to improve the detection and prevention of adulteration. Innovations in food testing, such as the use of rapid diagnostic kits and blockchain technology for traceability, can play a crucial role in enhancing food safety. Public awareness campaigns are equally important, as educating consumers about the risks of adulterated food and encouraging them to make informed choices can help reduce demand for such products. International collaboration is also essential, as food adulteration is a global issue that transcends borders and requires coordinated efforts to address.

Recent trends in food adulteration underscore the need for a proactive and adaptive approach to food safety. The increasing sophistication of adulteration techniques calls for advanced detection methods and stricter enforcement of regulations. Globalization demands greater coordination among countries to establish uniform standards and protocols for food safety. The rising consumer preference for health-oriented products highlights the importance of transparency and accountability in the food industry. Furthermore, addressing issues such as mislabeling and fraud in high-value items requires targeted interventions to protect both consumers and producers.

This study aims to examine the issue of food adulteration through a comparative lens, focusing on the regulatory landscapes of India and the United States. By analyzing the similarities and differences in the challenges faced and strategies adopted by these two nations, this research seeks to provide insights into effective approaches to combating food adulteration. In doing so, it highlights the need for a multifaceted strategy that combines regulatory oversight, technological innovation, consumer education, and international cooperation to ensure food safety and protect public health.

Food adulteration remains a pressing concern with far-reaching implications for health, safety, and economic stability. As the food industry continues to evolve in response to technological and societal changes, the need for robust and adaptive measures to address adulteration becomes increasingly urgent. Through a comprehensive analysis of the factors driving adulteration, the challenges faced by regulatory agencies, and the emerging trends in food safety, this study seeks to contribute to the ongoing efforts to safeguard the integrity of the global food supply.

Objectives:

- To assess the level of public awareness regarding the increasing prevalence of food adulteration

- To investigate the adverse health consequences and risks emanating from food adulteration
- To identify the detrimental effects of food adulteration on human health and the broader societal implications

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Collins [1] asserts that economic considerations influencing food supply, the structure and organisation of food manufacturing and distribution, and corporate ethics are of equal significance.

Cordella *et al.* [2] examined contemporary advancements in food characterisation and adulteration detection. This study provides a concise overview of the latest generation of analytical systems that integrate advanced analytical techniques with sophisticated computer software to optimise the extraction of information from analytical data.

Thakur *et al.* [3] examined the effects of a health education package on women's knowledge and practices concerning food adulteration. The survey indicated that just a portion of individuals recognised food adulteration. A notable increase in subject knowledge is observed.

Spink and Moyer [4] delineated the Public Health Threat posed by Food Fraud. The writers formulated the fundamental notions presented herein by thorough investigation of papers and reports, expert consultation, and a lengthy peer review process. This study serves as a foundation for subsequent research in food science, food safety, and food defence.

Ellis *et al.* [5] provides historical and contemporary context for these behaviours before presenting several methods available for detecting food adulteration and contamination. This field is particularly pertinent at present, as it encompasses ongoing challenges with food adulteration, as well as contemporary topics such as food security, bioterrorism, and climate change.

Schell *et al.* [6] conducted a study What is food adulteration in relation to human biology? Human scientists examining nutrition, disease, development, reproduction, and ageing may consider the non-nutritional constituents of food, as many possess the capacity to modify physiological functions.

Abidfaheem *et al.* [7] investigated food adulteration and familial awareness on food adulteration in a specific hamlet of Udupi Taluk, Karnataka. The study suggested that public awareness on food adulteration should be continuous, particularly among individuals with lower educational attainment.

Manning and Soon, [8] examines contemporary strategies for monitoring and detecting economically and criminally motivated food adulteration, assessing their strengths and weaknesses while proposing new approaches and policies to enhance future capabilities in combating adulteration within a globalised food context.

Handford *et al.* [9] examined the implications of milk fraud on nutrition and food safety, highlighting the possible negative health consequences for humans resulting from the use of contaminated milk. Due to heightened rivalry in the dairy market and the escalating intricacy of the supply chain, certain unscrupulous farmers are engaging in milk fraud.

Bansal *et al.* [10] aims to assemble various types of adulterations present in different food items, the health hazards associated with these adulterants, and the detection tools accessible to the public. The study indicated that molecular methods are superior for detecting biological adulterants in food, whereas physical and biochemical techniques are more suitable for identifying other types of adulterants.

Mishra [11] examines the perceptions of villages and rural life held by the burgeoning middle class in swiftly urbanising cities like Calcutta. The study indicated that a significant factor contributing to the public outrage around adulteration, particularly of milk and dairy products, was the emerging worry over increasing child mortality rates.

Hong *et al.* [12] examined contemporary analytical techniques for identifying food fraud and adulteration categorised by food type. This review presents up-to-date information on the analytical techniques employed to detect food adulteration in the six most commonly contaminated food categories. Notwithstanding recent progress, there persists a must for appropriately sensitive and broadly applicable techniques that address all facets of food adulteration.

Peng *et al.* [13] delineates the principal instances of food adulteration in Taiwan from 2011 to 2015, encompassing the contamination of food additives with plasticisers, starch products with maleic anhydride, olive oil with copper chlorophyll, lard with recycled cooking oil, and processed soy milk curd with dimethyl/diethyl yellow.

Fakhlaei *et al.* [14] offers a thorough and critical analysis of various forms of adulteration, prevalent sugar adulterants and their detection techniques, while elucidating the implications of honey adulteration on human health. The liver is the organ most frequently impacted by honey adulterants, followed by the kidney, heart, and brain, as evidenced by many in vivo research studies.

Valand *et al.* [15] provides a concise overview of food adulteration and authenticity ideas, together with an examination of the existing legislation pertaining to these offences. This article provides a comprehensive review of Fourier Transform Infrared (FTIR) as an analytical technique and the many foods in which FTIR analysis has been utilised for food fraud investigations.

Thangaraju *et al.* [16] examined food adulteration and its effects on public health and nutritional balance. This study intends to examine food adulteration, its motivations, various

forms, impacts on human health, and the principles of balanced nutrition. Research indicates that educating individuals about prevalent pollutants might effectively reduce adulteration.

Gopalan *et al.* [17] explored recent advancements in the educational sector, highlighting the growing emphasis on interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary studies. These developments aim to create a more holistic learning environment, allowing individuals to integrate diverse fields such as food and health into traditional educational curricula. Such an approach not only broadens the scope of knowledge but also equips learners with practical skills and awareness, fostering a deeper understanding of critical issues like nutrition, food safety, and public health alongside their core academic pursuits.

Haji *et al.* [18] examined the adulteration of selected food items, its effects on public health, and techniques of detection. This review is to present current information regarding food adulteration, its health implications, and the analytical methods employed to identify adulteration in food products.

Islam *et al.* [19] Deleterious practices of food adulteration and their alarming implications for public health. The utilisation of essence, industrialisation, and the cost of progress all contribute to the advancement of civilisation and the contamination of food. It is a consequence of unchecked corporate consumption and egotism, which is pursued deliberately to optimise profit.

Kameswari *et al.* [20] examined food adulteration and its effects on the health preventive and issues faced by adolescents. This study assists in determining methods for individuals to ascertain the adulteration of a product. This study emphasises the types of adulteration, its health impacts, and prevention measures through government legislation.

Momtaz *et al.* [21] examines the various types of food adulteration. This article briefly discusses the health implications. The research indicates that food adulteration is a comprehensive issue that cannot be addressed alone by policymakers and implementers. Food manufacturers and retailers, in conjunction with consumers, ought to collaborate in fostering a secure environment within their nation.

Saravanakumar *et al.* [22] The discharge of industrial effluents into the ecosystem poses significant environmental, public health, and safety risks. Effluents from industries such as tanning, leather, petrochemicals, pharmaceuticals, and textiles place considerable stress on aquatic ecosystems, leading to increased toxicity, endocrine disruption, and impaired reproductive functions. This review provides a comprehensive summary of the impacts of these effluents, highlighting their interactions with modern pollutants, including pharmaceuticals, cosmetic chemicals, nanoparticles, and heavy metals.

Maheshwari *et al.* [23] in their study highlights the prevalence of food adulteration and its severe implications on public health, particularly in developing countries like India. It discusses commonly adulterated foods, such as milk, spices, and oils, and examines their toxic effects, including gastrointestinal issues, organ damage, and long-term carcinogenic risks.

In a study provides an overview of food adulteration practices in India, focusing on key food items like dairy, fruits, and vegetables. It emphasizes the role of inadequate regulations and weak enforcement mechanisms in exacerbating the public health crisis.

Thiruvengadam *et al.* [24] in their study identifies chemical adulterants such as pesticides, detergents, and synthetic colors used in food products. It explains their toxicological effects, including endocrine disruption, neurotoxicity, and developmental issues.

Lakshmanaswamy *et al.* [25] in their research outlines common adulterants in milk and dairy products, such as urea, starch, and formalin. It highlights the widespread consumption of adulterated dairy and its adverse health impacts, including kidney failure, digestive issues, and compromised immunity.

In a study examines food adulteration in spices, edible oils, and beverages, identifying contaminants like lead, argemone oil, and artificial sweeteners. It discusses their potential to cause serious health concerns, such as liver toxicity, cardiac issues, and neurological disorders.

The study explores the adulteration of fruits and vegetables through hazardous substances like calcium carbide and oxytocin. It sheds light on their role in inducing early ripening, which results in harmful health effects such as hormonal imbalance, respiratory problems, and cancer risks.

In a study highlights the adulteration of meat and fish with harmful chemicals such as formaldehyde and ammonia. It evaluates their consequences on public health, focusing on carcinogenic effects, gastrointestinal disturbances, and organ damage.

In a study paper investigates the socio-economic factors driving food adulteration, including profit motives, consumer demand, and regulatory gaps. It explains how adulteration disproportionately affects vulnerable populations and perpetuates health disparities in India.

In a study article assesses government initiatives and food safety regulations aimed at combating adulteration. It emphasizes the need for stricter enforcement, public awareness campaigns, and improved food testing infrastructure to ensure food safety and protect public health.

The studies by Manning and Soon [8] and Spink and Moyer [4] offer comprehensive frameworks for understanding food adulteration detection methods and the policies addressing food fraud. However, while their reviews provide valuable theoretical insights, one significant limitation is the

lack of practical, large-scale solutions that can be applied globally. Both studies discuss sophisticated detection systems and their theoretical advantages but do not extensively explore the challenges of implementing these methods in real-world, diverse food production and distribution settings. For instance, advanced detection techniques may be effective in controlled laboratory environments but might face limitations when scaled up for use in local markets or small-scale producers. Additionally, many of the discussed technologies require significant resources, such as specialized equipment or highly trained personnel, which may not be accessible in developing regions or where regulatory systems are weak. Therefore, while these studies offer a broad understanding of detection methods, they fail to critically assess the feasibility of these technologies being implemented in widespread, everyday food safety practices across different countries and markets.

Similarly, Hong *et al.* [12] provides a valuable review of contemporary analytical techniques for food adulteration detection, highlighting their applications across various food types. However, the practical applicability of these technologies is not fully explored in terms of their limitations in sensitivity or adaptability to different food types. For example, while advanced techniques like high-performance liquid chromatography (HPLC) or mass spectrometry may offer excellent accuracy for detecting specific adulterants in certain food categories, their effectiveness can vary when applied to other foods, especially those with complex matrices or multiple contaminants. Additionally, the sensitivity of these techniques may not always be sufficient for detecting low-level adulteration, which is a common concern in the food industry. Thus, a more critical evaluation of these technologies would include discussions of their limitations in sensitivity, cost, time constraints, and how they compare in practicality with simpler, less expensive methods that may be more widely available.

In the case of Bansal *et al.* [10], which contrasts molecular, physical, and biochemical detection methods, the review presents a broad range of techniques for identifying adulterants in food. While molecular techniques like DNA-based assays are often seen as highly accurate for detecting biological adulterants, their applicability in real-world contexts can be challenging due to their complexity and the need for specialized equipment and expertise. On the other hand, physical and biochemical techniques, such as spectroscopy and simple chemical tests, are more accessible but may lack the sensitivity or specificity required to identify certain types of adulterants accurately. These methods may also struggle with distinguishing between similar substances or detecting new, evolving forms of adulteration. A critical analysis of Bansal *et al.* [10] could focus on how these detection techniques might perform in real-world scenarios where adulteration is often complex and varies greatly across different food types. For example, while molecular methods may excel in detecting certain biological contaminants, they may be less effective for detecting chemical adulterants or other non-biological contaminants that are often found in food. Hence, the real-world application of these techniques could be compromised by issues such as cost, accessibility, and the need for rapid detection methods, which might not always align with the capabilities of these sophisticated methods.

METHODS

This study follows an empirical research methodology to explore public awareness and perceptions regarding food adulteration. A structured approach was employed to ensure that the data collected was reliable, valid, and relevant for understanding the level of awareness about food adulteration across various demographic groups.

Research Design

This study adopts a descriptive research design, focusing on gathering quantitative data to describe and analyze the patterns of awareness and perceptions related to food adulteration. The primary aim is to examine how different demographic variables (age, gender, education, income, etc.) influence respondents' awareness and perceptions of food adulteration in Chennai.

Population and Sample

The target population of this study consists of individuals from public spaces in and around Chennai, India. The sample was stratified to ensure it represented the metropolitan populace in terms of key demographic factors such as age, gender, educational level, income, and occupation.

The sampling technique employed is stratified random sampling, which divides the population into different strata based on certain characteristics (age, gender, education, etc.). A total of 222 respondents were selected for the survey, which ensures diversity in the sample and allows for a representative analysis of the population's awareness and perceptions.

Data Collection Method

The data collection for this study was conducted through a structured questionnaire, which served as the primary instrument for gathering information. The questionnaire was designed to collect demographic data and assess respondents' awareness and perceptions of food adulteration.

The questionnaire consisted of two main sections:

- **Section A:** Demographic information (e.g., age, gender, education, income, occupation, geographical location).
- **Section B:** A series of questions designed to assess respondents' awareness of food adulteration and its implications. This section included both multiple-choice

and Likert-scale questions regarding the respondents' awareness levels, perceptions of food adulteration's impact on nutritional quality, and health effects.

The questionnaire was administered in public spaces around Chennai to ensure accessibility to a wide cross-section of individuals. This approach also allowed for a diverse respondent pool from both urban and rural areas, although the sample predominantly consisted of urban dwellers (98.57%).

Pre-testing and Validation of the Questionnaire

To ensure that the questionnaire was both valid and reliable, the following validation steps were undertaken:

- **Pre-testing:** A small sample group from a similar demographic profile was surveyed before the full-scale study. This pre-test helped identify ambiguities in question wording and unclear concepts. Feedback from this group was used to refine the questionnaire.
- **Expert Review:** The content of the questionnaire was reviewed by food safety experts and public health professionals to ensure that the questions accurately captured the necessary data on food adulteration awareness and perceptions. The experts assessed the relevance and comprehensiveness of the questions.
- **Reliability Testing:** The internal consistency of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. This reliability test confirmed that the items within the questionnaire were consistent in measuring the intended constructs related to food adulteration awareness and perceptions.

Data Analysis

Once the data collection process was completed, the data were entered into a statistical software package for analysis. The data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics to achieve the following:

- **Descriptive Statistics:** These were used to summarize and describe the demographic characteristics of the respondents, including frequency distributions, percentages, means, and standard deviations. This analysis helped in understanding the general trends in awareness and perceptions of food adulteration among different groups.
- **Inferential Statistics:** To examine the relationships between demographic variables and levels of awareness, chi-square tests and t-tests were conducted. These tests helped determine if there were statistically significant differences in awareness levels based on factors like age, gender, income, and education.
- **Data Visualization:** Results were visually represented through charts and graphs to provide a clear understanding of key patterns in the data. This also aided in identifying gaps in awareness and highlighting significant demographic trends.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to strict ethical guidelines to ensure the confidentiality and integrity of the respondents:

- **Informed Consent:** Prior to participation, respondents were informed about the purpose of the study and their right to privacy. They were asked to sign an informed consent form, indicating their voluntary participation.
- **Confidentiality:** All responses were treated as confidential, and no personal identifying information was collected. The data were used solely for research purposes.
- **Non-coercion:** Participation was voluntary, and respondents had the right to withdraw from the survey at any point without any consequences.

Data Analysis

The Pearson chi-square value presented in the table is 0.194, above 0.005. The Alternative hypothesis is rejected, and the Null hypothesis is accepted. The aforementioned table revealed that there is no correlation between age and awareness of the rising instances of food adulteration (Table 1).

The Pearson chi-square value from the aforementioned table is 0.766, above 0.005. The Alternative hypothesis is rejected, and the Null hypothesis is accepted. The aforementioned table indicates that there is no correlation between educational qualifications and awareness of the rising instances of food adulteration (Table 2).

Table 1: Age * Are you aware of increasing cases in food adulteration Crosstabulation

Age Group	Yes	No	Total
11-20	59	28	87
21-30	72	16	88
31-40	13	8	21
41-50	8	3	11
Above 50	2	1	3
Total	154	56	210

Test	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Chi-Square Tests			
Pearson Chi-Square	6.067[a]	4	0.194
Likelihood Ratio	6.180	4	0.186
Linear-by-Linear Association	0.082	1	0.775
N of Valid Cases	210		

[a]3 cells (30.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 0.80

Table 2: ANOVA, Are you aware of increasing cases in food adulteration

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	0.106	2	0.053	0.267	0.766
Within Groups	40.961	207	0.198		
Total	41.067	209			

RESULTS

The results of the study, as depicted in Figures 1-18, provide insights into the demographic characteristics of the respondents, their awareness of food adulteration, and their perceptions regarding its implications.

Demographic Profile of Respondents

Age Group (Figure 1): The majority of respondents belonged to the younger age groups, with 41.43% falling within the 11-20 age group and 41.90% in the 21-30 age group. A smaller proportion were aged 31-40 years (10.00%), 41-50 years (5.24%), and over 50 years (1.43%).

Gender (Figure 2): A greater percentage of respondents were male (57.62%) compared to female (42.38%).

Educational Qualification (Figure 3): The educational profile showed that 15.24% were Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) students, 58.57% were undergraduates, and 26.19% were postgraduates.

Geographical Background (Figure 4): The vast majority (98.57%) of respondents resided in metropolitan areas, with only 1.43% originating from rural areas.

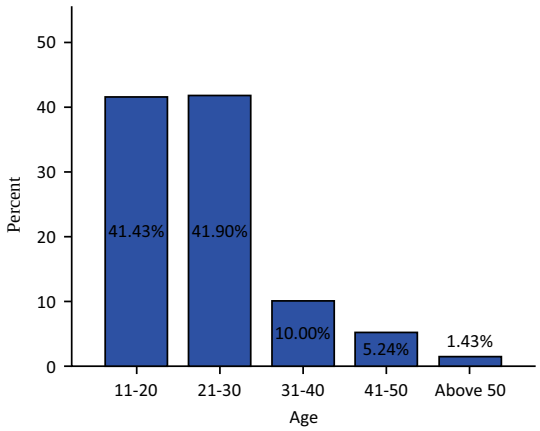


Figure 1: Represents the age group of the respondents

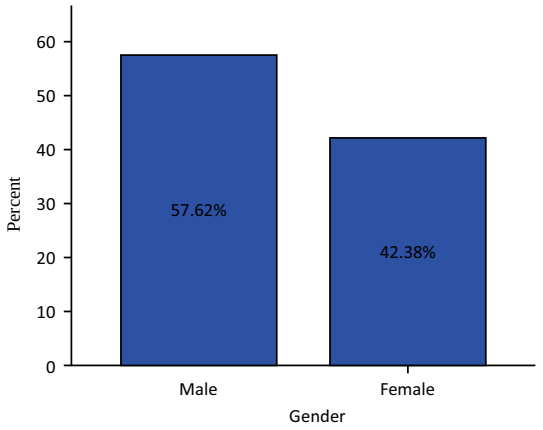


Figure 2: Represents the gender group of the respondents

Income Levels (Figure 5): Income distribution varied significantly. Nearly half (48.10%) of the respondents

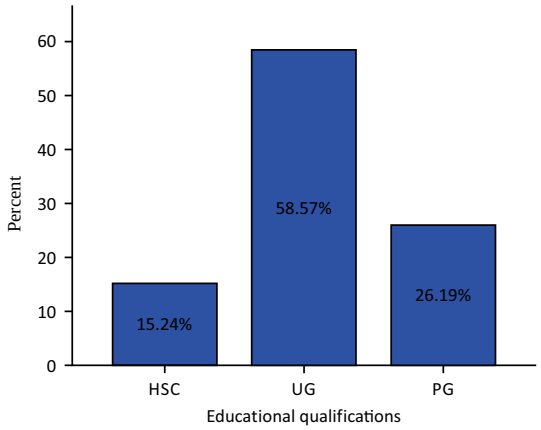


Figure 3: Represents the educational qualification of the respondents

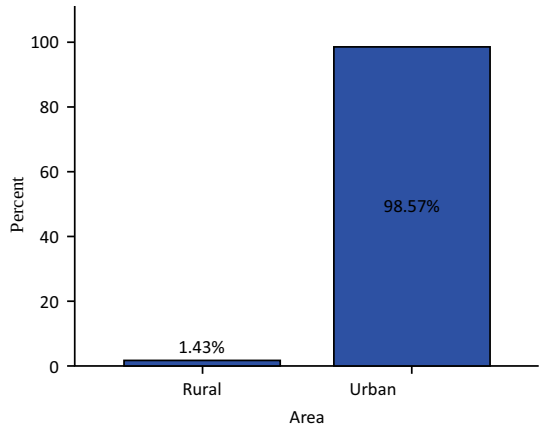


Figure 4: Represents the area of living of the respondents

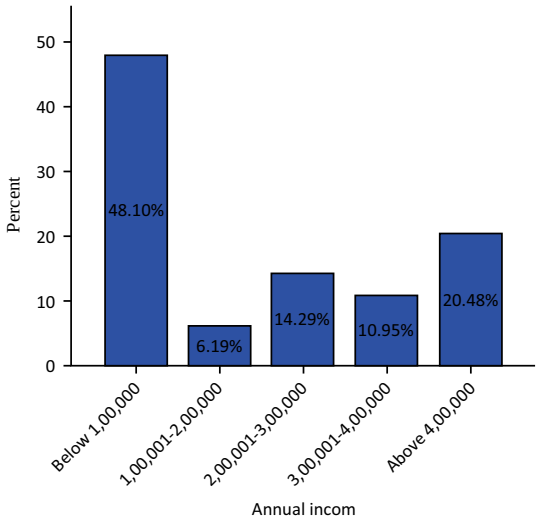


Figure 5: Represents the annual income of the respondents

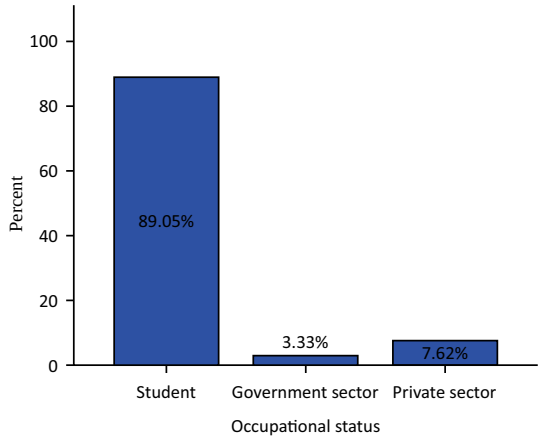


Figure 6: Represents the occupational status of the respondents

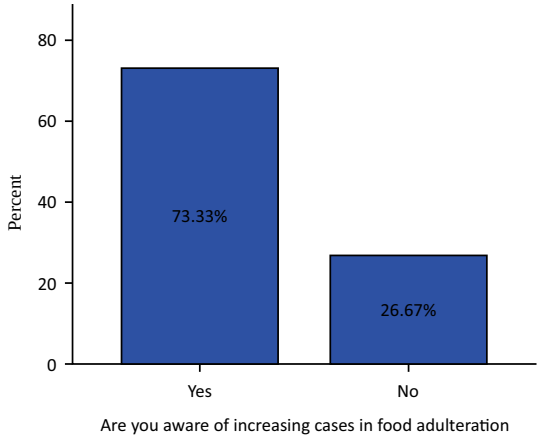


Figure 7 Represents the awareness of respondents

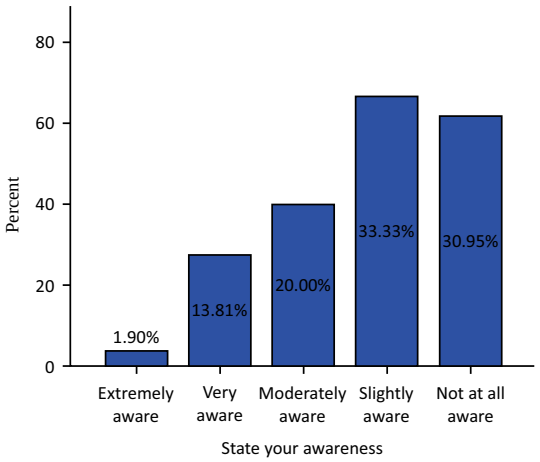


Figure 8: Represents the awareness of the respondents

reported earning below 100,000, while 6.19% earned between 100,001 and 200,000, 14.29% between 200,001 and 300,000, 10.95% between 300,001 and 400,000, and 20.48% earned above 400,000.

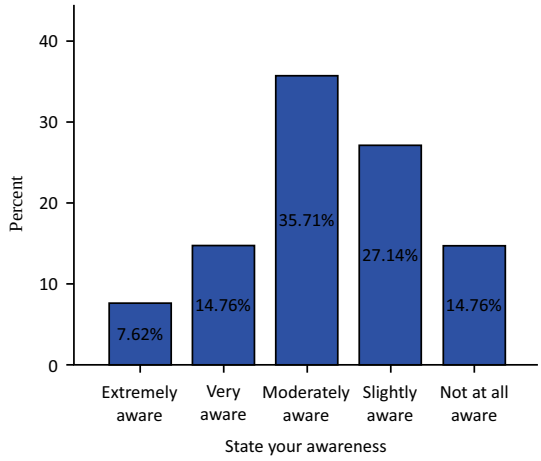


Figure 9: Represents the awareness of the respondents

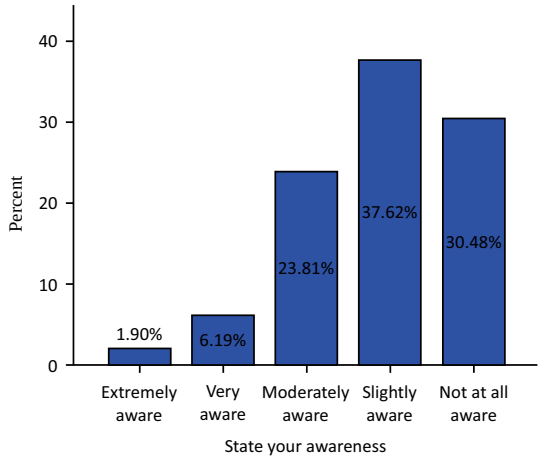


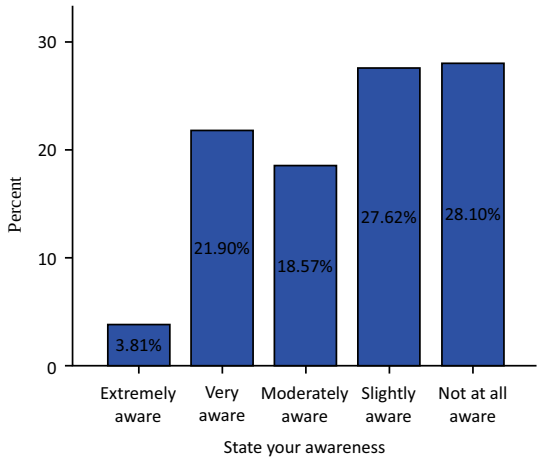
Figure 10 represents the agreeability of the respondents

Occupational Status (Figure 6): A large proportion of respondents (89.05%) were students. Other occupational categories included the government sector (3.33%) and the private sector (7.62%).

Awareness of Food Adulteration

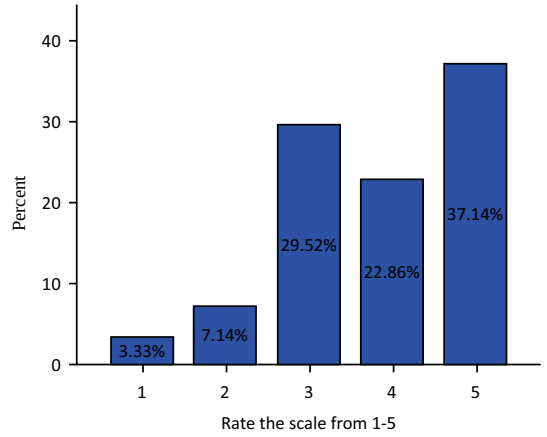
General Awareness (Figure 7): Approximately 73.33% of respondents were aware of the rising instances of food adulteration, whereas 26.67% were unaware.

Levels of Awareness - Statement 1 (Figure 8): Regarding specific awareness statements, 1.90% of respondents were extremely aware, 13.81% very aware, 20.00% somewhat aware, 33.33% slightly aware, and 30.95% not at all aware.



Food adulteration resulting from manufacturing and processing can also cause adverse effect on human health

Figure 11: Represents the agreeability of the respondents



Food adulteration is a major harmful cause in both the developed and less developed countries

Figure 12: Represents respondents rating on the food quality

Levels of Awareness - Statement 2 (Figure 9): For a second awareness statement, 7.62% of respondents were extremely aware, 14.76% very aware, 35.71% somewhat aware, 27.14% slightly aware, and 14.76% not at all aware.

Perceptions of Food Adulteration

Agreement with Statement 1 (Figure 10): When asked about a statement on food adulteration, 1.90% of respondents strongly disagreed, 6.19% disagreed, 23.81% were neutral, 37.62% agreed, and 30.48% strongly agreed.

Agreement with Statement 2 (Figure 11): On another statement, 3.81% of respondents strongly disagreed, 21.90% disagreed, 18.57% were neutral, 27.62% agreed, and 28.10% strongly agreed.

Perception Scores (Figure 12): Respondents rated their agreement on a scale, with 3.33% scoring 1, 7.14% scoring 2, 29.52% scoring 3, 22.86% scoring 4, and 37.14% scoring 5.

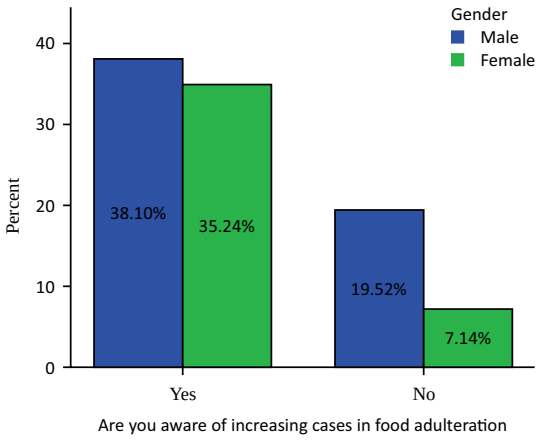
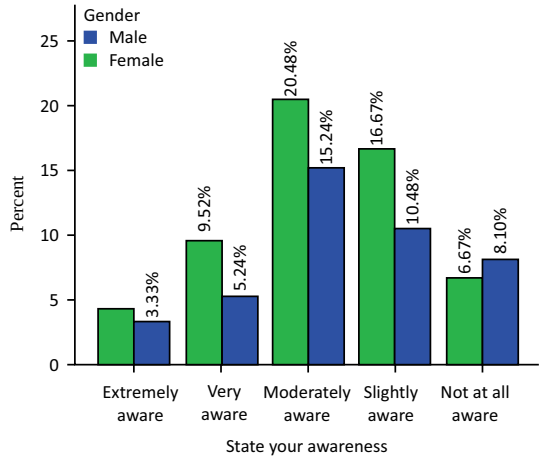


Figure 13: Represents the respondents gender group and their awareness



The adulterants are found in all the food stuffs viz. milk and milk products, vegetables, oil and fats, spices and condiments, beverages like coffee, tea etc.

Figure 14 represents the respondents gender group and their awareness

Gender-based Awareness

Awareness of Rising Food Adulteration (Figure 13): Among male respondents, 38.10% were aware, and 19.52% were unaware. For female respondents, 35.24% were aware, and 7.14% were unaware.

Levels of Awareness - Statement 1 (Figure 14): Extreme awareness was exhibited by 4.27% of male respondents and 3.33% of female respondents. Very high awareness was demonstrated by 9.52% of males and 5.24% of females. Moderate awareness was observed among 20.48% of males and 15.24% of females. Slight awareness was displayed by 16.67% of males and 10.48% of females, while 6.67% of males and 8.10% of females were completely unaware.

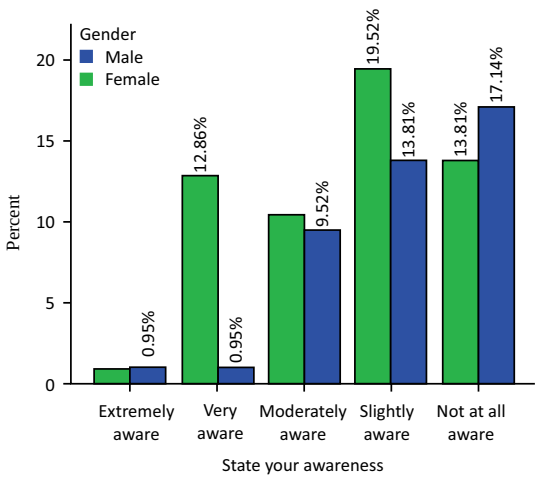


Figure 15: Represents the respondents gender group and their awareness

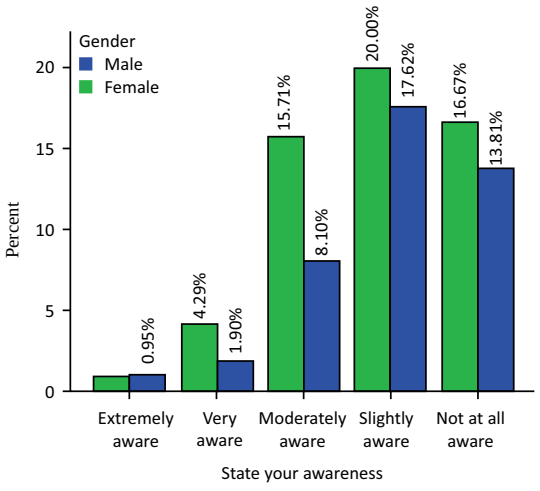


Figure 16: Represents the respondents gender group and their agreeability

Levels of Awareness - Statement 2 (Figure 15): Extreme awareness was observed among 0.95% of both males and females. High awareness was demonstrated by 12.86% of males and 0.95% of females. Moderate awareness was shown by 10.22% of males and 9.52% of females. Slight awareness was exhibited by 19.52% of males and 13.81% of females, while 13.81% of males and 17.14% of females were completely unaware.

Impacts of Food Adulteration

Perception of Nutritional Quality Impact (Figure 16): Regarding the impact of adulteration on food composition and

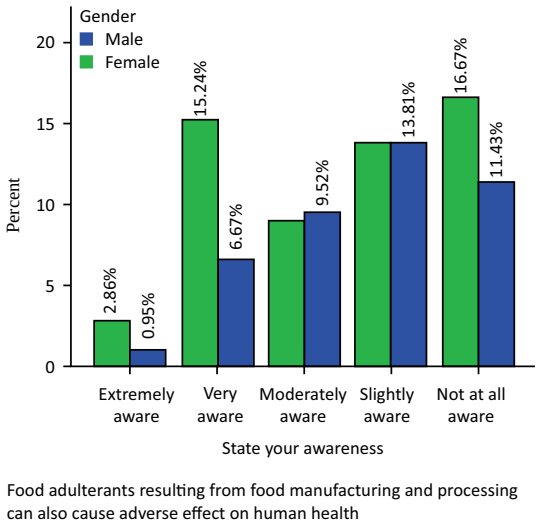


Figure 17: Represents the respondents gender group and their agreeability

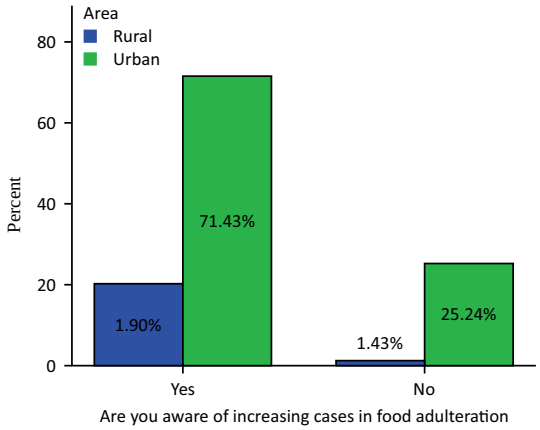


Figure 18: Represents the respondents area and their awareness

nutritional quality, 0.95% of both males and females strongly disagreed, 4.29% of males and 1.90% of females disagreed, 15.71% of males and 8.10% of females were neutral, 20.00% of males and 17.62% of females agreed, and 16.67% of males and 13.81% of females strongly agreed.

Health Effects of Adulterants (Figure 17): When considering the adverse health effects of adulterants, 2.86% of males and 0.95% of females strongly disagreed, 15.24% of males and 6.67% of females disagreed, 9.04% of males and 9.52% of females were neutral, 13.81% of both males and females agreed, and 16.67% of males and 11.43% of females strongly agreed.

Awareness by Region (Figure 18): In rural areas, 1.90% of respondents were aware, while 1.43% were unaware. In urban areas, 71.43% were aware, and 25.24% were unaware of the rising incidence of food adulteration.

DISCUSSION

Demographics and Awareness

The demographic distribution of respondents reveals that the majority belong to younger age groups (11-30 years), particularly the 21-30 age group (41.90%). This finding is consistent with the fact that younger individuals, especially students (89.05%), are more likely to participate in surveys due to their accessibility and engagement with educational initiatives. Moreover, the gender distribution, with 57.62% male respondents, indicates a slight gender imbalance, which could influence perspectives on food adulteration and health awareness.

Educational qualifications of respondents show a predominance of undergraduate students (58.57%), reflecting the study's focus on reaching an educated population capable of understanding the technical and health-related aspects of food adulteration. Additionally, the overwhelming representation of respondents from metropolitan areas (98.57%) highlights the urban-centric nature of the survey and suggests greater awareness of food safety issues in urban environments compared to rural areas, as illustrated in Figure 18.

Economic and Occupational Factors

The income distribution indicates that nearly half (48.10%) of respondents earn below 100,000 annually, representing low-income groups more vulnerable to the impacts of adulterated food products. Lower income may limit access to higher-quality, unadulterated food, potentially exacerbating health risks. Occupational data reveal that students constitute the majority of respondents (89.05%), emphasizing the critical role of educational institutions in spreading awareness about food adulteration.

Awareness of Food Adulteration

A significant proportion of respondents (73.33%) are aware of the rising instances of food adulteration, indicating an encouraging level of general awareness. However, detailed responses reveal varying levels of understanding. For instance, while 33.33% have marginal awareness (Figure 8) and 35.71% moderate awareness (Figure 9), a considerable portion of respondents lack comprehensive knowledge about adulterants in specific food items such as milk, vegetables, oils, spices, and beverages (Figures 14 and 15). This partial awareness could be attributed to limited exposure to public health campaigns or inadequate dissemination of information about specific adulterants and their effects.

Gender-based analysis (Figures 13-15) shows that male respondents exhibit slightly higher levels of awareness compared to females, with 38.10% of males and 35.24% of females being cognizant of rising food adulteration. This disparity could reflect differences in access to information or varying priorities regarding food safety. Interestingly, 19.52% of males demonstrated slight awareness compared to 17.14% of females who were completely unaware, highlighting a gap that could be bridged through targeted awareness programs focusing on female populations.

Health Implications and Perceptions

Respondents demonstrated a general consensus regarding the adverse health impacts of food adulteration. For example, 37.62% agreed, and 30.48% strongly agreed that food adulteration compromises the nutritional content of food products (Figure 10). Similarly, a significant proportion strongly concurred (28.10%) with the notion that food adulterants impact food safety and public health (Figure 11). Figures 16 and 17 further underscore the health-related perceptions of respondents. Approximately 20.00% of male and 17.62% of female respondents agreed that adulteration affects the nutritional quality of food, while 16.67% of males strongly agreed that adulterants in manufacturing and processing adversely affect health. These findings reflect an understanding of the potential dangers posed by adulterated food, including long-term health effects such as cancer, organ damage, and other chronic illnesses. However, the proportion of respondents exhibiting neutral or dissenting opinions indicates a gap in comprehensive knowledge about the specific health risks of food adulteration.

Urban-Rural Divide in Awareness

The geographical disparity in awareness is particularly striking. While 71.43% of respondents from urban areas are aware of food adulteration, only 1.90% from rural areas demonstrate similar awareness (Figure 18). This stark contrast highlights the need for targeted interventions in rural areas, where lack of awareness, combined with limited access to safe and unadulterated food, poses significant public health challenges. Public health campaigns, community outreach, and stricter regulatory measures could address this urban-rural divide and mitigate risks associated with adulterated food consumption.

Linking Awareness to Action

Although a substantial proportion of respondents are aware of food adulteration, their awareness appears to be largely passive, as suggested by marginal or moderate awareness levels (Figures 8 and 9). This disconnect between awareness and actionable knowledge underscores the need for practical education initiatives that empower individuals to identify adulterated food products and demand stricter quality standards. For example, campaigns that teach simple methods to detect common adulterants in food could significantly enhance consumer empowerment.

The findings of this study underline the pressing issue of food adulteration and its public health implications in India. The widespread but uneven awareness among respondents

highlights the need for targeted interventions, particularly in rural areas and among vulnerable populations such as women and low-income groups.

In conclusion, while awareness of food adulteration is encouragingly high among urban, educated populations, significant gaps remain in translating this awareness into preventive action and addressing the needs of underrepresented demographics. Addressing these gaps is critical to mitigating the toxic health effects of adulterated food and ensuring a healthier future for all.

Suggestions

Food adulteration poses a significant threat to consumer health and safety, necessitating immediate and comprehensive action. Governments must implement stringent regulations and establish robust enforcement mechanisms, including routine inspections of food manufacturing facilities, advanced testing of food samples, and severe penalties for violators. Regulatory bodies should leverage technological innovations such as blockchain for supply chain transparency and AI-based systems for real-time detection of adulterants.

For consumers, adopting safe practices is equally vital. This includes purchasing food from trusted sources, meticulously scrutinizing labels for certifications, and promptly reporting suspicious products to authorities. Community-level interventions, such as public workshops, can further educate individuals on simple methods to identify adulterated food.

Future studies should focus on advancing AI-driven real-time adulterant detection systems, enhancing machine learning algorithms to identify a broader spectrum of adulterants with improved precision. Research should aim to refine AI models and develop cutting-edge technologies, such as hyperspectral imaging and chemical sensors, to enable more efficient and accurate analysis of food products. An interdisciplinary approach involving food science, AI, chemistry, and data analytics will be essential to creating systems that are adaptable to regional variations and capable of handling complex food matrices.

Moreover, integrating AI with blockchain technology can significantly improve supply chain transparency and traceability. Future research should explore the development of industry-wide standards and regulations to support the reliable and valid use of AI in food safety practices.

Further studies should also address consumer perceptions and trust in AI-driven food safety technologies. Understanding public engagement and fostering awareness will be crucial for encouraging the widespread adoption of these technologies. In conclusion, interdisciplinary collaboration across technology, regulation, and public education will be pivotal in advancing AI-based adulteration detection, ensuring safer food practices, and protecting public health on a global scale.

Educational campaigns targeting schools, colleges, and rural communities can play a transformative role in raising awareness about the health risks posed by adulterated food and empowering individuals to make informed dietary choices. Collaborative efforts between governments, non-governmental organizations, and media can amplify the reach and impact of these initiatives.

Limitations

While the study was designed to be comprehensive, several limitations should be acknowledged. One of the primary limitations is the sampling method employed. Although a stratified sampling approach was used to ensure diversity across key demographic characteristics, data collection took place in public spaces. This may have introduced a sampling bias, as people who frequent public areas may not be representative of the entire population. Specifically, individuals from higher or lower socio-economic backgrounds, those with specific health concerns, or individuals who do not engage in public spaces regularly may have been underrepresented in the sample. This could impact the generalizability of the findings to all of Chennai's population.

Another significant limitation is the urban-rural divide in the sample. The overwhelming majority of respondents (98.57%) were from urban areas, with only a small proportion of rural respondents. This urban-centric sample limits the study's ability to provide insights into rural populations, where awareness of food adulteration may be significantly lower. The differences in access to information, education, and food safety resources between urban and rural areas could mean that the findings do not accurately reflect the perceptions and awareness levels of individuals in less urbanized regions, thus making it difficult to apply the results broadly across both settings.

Lastly, the study relied on self-reported data, which can introduce response bias. Respondents may not always provide accurate or truthful answers, particularly when discussing sensitive topics like health and safety issues related to food adulteration. Social desirability bias may influence participants to provide responses they think are more acceptable or in line with societal norms, rather than expressing their true knowledge or experiences. Additionally, respondents' understanding of food adulteration could vary, and some may have overestimated or underestimated their own awareness of the issue, further complicating the accuracy of the results.

CONCLUSION

Food adulteration remains a critical challenge, posing severe risks to public health, eroding consumer confidence, and threatening the integrity of the food supply chain. The health impacts of consuming adulterated food range from acute

illnesses to chronic diseases such as cancer, making it an urgent public health issue. Beyond health, adulteration imposes economic burdens by increasing healthcare costs, reducing productivity, and harming the reputation of food industries.

To combat this menace effectively, a multi-stakeholder approach is essential. Governments must implement stringent regulations and enforcement mechanisms to ensure accountability across the food supply chain. The use of emerging technologies, such as real-time detection tools and blockchain for transparent tracking, can significantly enhance the efficacy of these efforts.

Given the globalized nature of the food industry, international cooperation is paramount. Sharing best practices, data, and technological innovations can strengthen the global food safety framework and facilitate a coordinated response to the challenges of adulteration.

At the consumer level, increased awareness and proactive behavior are critical. Educating individuals on identifying and avoiding adulterated food can empower them to safeguard their health while collectively pressuring industries to uphold higher standards.

In conclusion, tackling food adulteration is an intricate and ongoing challenge that demands a synthesis of rigorous regulatory measures, technological advancements, global collaboration, and public awareness. By fostering collaboration among governments, regulatory bodies, industries, and consumers, we can ensure the authenticity, safety, and integrity of the food we consume, ultimately safeguarding public health and restoring confidence in the food supply system.

Acknowledgments

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this research. The study was conducted independently, and no financial or personal relationships influenced the design, execution, or interpretation of the findings. All authors confirm that the results are presented honestly and without bias, and the research was carried out with the sole intention of contributing to the understanding of food adulteration awareness in Chennai.

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