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32% of ultra-processed F&B products in India meet WHO thresholds for FSS: Study

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By **Manbeena Chawla** | December 1, 2021



32-of-ultra-processed-fb-products-in-india-meet-who-thresholds-for-fss-study

WordPress post #13180

Experts believe finding reinforces importance of evidence-based cut-offs on salt, sugar and fats and front of pack labelling

A recent analysis of more than 10,000 food and beverage (F&B) products currently available in the Indian food market, has revealed that about 68% of these products have excess amounts of at least one ingredient of concern (fat, salt, sugar or FSS) whereas 32% are within the scientific thresholds recommended WHO regional standards.

As the Food Safety Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) prepares to adopt a front-of-the-pack food label (FOPL), public health experts and consumer rights organisations have welcomed this finding which demonstrates that the nutrient profile model (NPM) from the WHO Southeast Asian Regional Office (SEARO) is appropriate and practicable for the Indian ultra-processed food market and may encourage the industry to embrace science and evidence-based cut-offs on salt, sugar and saturated fat.

Dr Chandrakant S. Pandav, Former Professor & Head of the Department – Centre for Community Medicine at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), New Delhi said, “Our study finds that applying the SEARO NPM cut-off points would result in 68% of products in the market requiring at least one warning label. This is in stark contrast to an earlier study undertaken by Nutrition Alchemy, utilizing a small dataset of 1,300 which found that 96% of products would require a label. This creates an erroneous impression that FOPL based on the SEARO NPM is not practicable and based on the ground reality. A team of researchers and nutritionists from UNC (University of North Carolina) who have done similar analyses across many countries (the US, Mexico, Chile, Peru and South Africa and assisted the UK Dept of Health) and are experts in understanding nutrition information and food labels came together for this important study which can aid the FOPL process in India.”

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