

Practice of *Phoenix dactylifera* (Dates) among Residents in Kg. Dato' Ahmad Razali, Dengkil, Selangor: A Preliminary Study

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Abstract—In Malaysia, the increasing demands on prophetic diet are shown through huge numbers of prophetic food products manufactured by Malay Muslim's companies such as Hiraq Marketing, Saffron Integrated Marketing, Qaseh Gold, Naturalherbs and many more. The mushrooming of prophetic food products has shown an increased awareness among Muslim community in Malaysia in practicing Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad S.A.W. Despite the increasing demands of prophetic diet, there are few studies done in Malaysia to determine the actual practice among Muslim Malaysian communities. This preliminary study, which consisted of 40 adult residents in Kg. Dato' Ahmad Razali, Sepang found that 35% of the respondents consumed dates only during Ramadhan or fasting month and this result showed that the level of practice of dates consumption was still low. Therefore, further large scale study needs to be done to promote the consumption of this prophetic food, not only among Muslims but non-Muslims as well. The acceptance of prophetic foods may lead to a healthier eating practice, thus improving one's health status.

Index Terms—Prophetic foods, religiosity, culture, healthy eating.

I. INTRODUCTION

Food plays a great significance in religious faith such as Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism and Hinduism. Food choices, lifestyle, beliefs, culture, environment and knowledge of a person influence the eating habits of a person [1]. For Muslims, their daily life activities such as what they eat are considered as the way of worshipping Allah when it is done correctly and accordingly. In Islam, the consumption of foods rich in nutrients and beneficial to one's health had been mentioned in the Holy Quran, Surah Al-Baqarah, verse 168 "*O mankind, eat from whatever is on earth [that is] lawful and good and do not follow the footsteps of Satan. Indeed, he is to you a clear enemy*".

Dates have been mentioned several times in Al-Quran and *Hadith*. During the birth of Isa A.S., Maryam was asked to take date fruits to relieve her labor pains as mentioned in the Holy Quran, surah Maryam, verse 25-26, *And shake towards you the trunk of the palm tree, it will drop on you fresh ripe dates, so eat and drink and be comforted*. Besides, there are

many narrations from the prophet (pbuh) regarding dates and they are highly praised as one of the prophetic foods in Islam. In Hadith Bukhari, the prophet (pbuh) mentioned, "*If somebody takes seven 'Ajwa dates in the morning, neither magic nor poison will hurt him that day*" [2].

II. PROBLEM STATEMENT AND OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

Many researches have shown numerous therapeutic effects of prophetic foods such as dates, olive oils and honey. The magnificence health benefits of these foods have been recorded in Al-Quran and Hadith. Besides, seven spices or seven types of fruits and grains have been mentioned in book of Taurah which are wheat, barley, grape, figs, pomegranates, olives dates and honey. Many references regarding these basic foods can also be found in Bible [3]. The promising outcomes and health beneficial effects shown in prophetic foods have significantly proved that the practice of prophetic foods can be practiced by everyone regardless of their ethnicity, religions or their beliefs.

In Malaysia, the increasing demands of prophetic diet are shown through huge numbers of prophetic food products manufactured by Malay Muslim's companies such as Hiraq Marketing, Saffron Integrated Marketing, Qaseh Gold, Naturalherbs and many more. The mushrooming of prophetic food products has shown an increased awareness among Muslim community in Malaysia in practicing the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad S.A.W. Despite the increasing demands on prophetic diet, there are very minimal studies done in Malaysia to determine the sociocultural acceptance towards prophetic foods among Muslim Malaysian community. Thus, the main objective of this preliminary study is to determine the practice and consumption of dates among small samples of Muslim Malaysian village residents which actually reflects their sociocultural acceptance towards prophetic foods. At the same time, this preliminary study will act as a baseline measure before conducting a large scale study in order to promote a better healthy eating practice through consumption of prophetic foods.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS

Culture can be defined as values, attitudes and practices accepted by a group of community. Basically, culture will be passed from generation to generation [4]. According to [5], sociocultural influences are crucial in determining individual's eating behavior and the individual's behavior normally influences by social norms and standards. In addition, the types of food consumed by individuals are

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mostly determined by their own religion [6]. Moreover, one study concluded that the impact of religion on food consumption depends on the religion itself [7]. For Muslim consumers, religion plays significant role in determining Muslims' food consumption. Muslims are bound to observe dietary laws as regulated by Syari'ah in order to sustain their well-beings. Even in other faiths, the followers also obey what is instructed in their religion including their prospects of eating. For example, just like Muslims, Jews also adhere strictly to their Kosher principle [8]. Hence, it is hypothesized that Muslim community should possess higher sociocultural acceptance towards prophetic foods, especially dates by having dates as part of their daily eating habit.

IV. METHODOLOGY

A. Study Subjects

This preliminary study involved 40 respondents live in Kg. Dato' Ahmad Razali, Dengkil, Sepang, Selangor through convenience sampling. Kg. Dato' Ahmad Razali is located 10 kilometers from Precinct 3, Putrajaya, which serves as the federal administrative centre of Malaysia.

B. Survey Development and Administration

This preliminary study was conducted using face to face survey with the respondents to obtain their socio-demographic data and to determine the frequency of dates consumption as well as their health reasons to consume dates. Five health reasons questionnaires were asked based on a thorough literature review regarding the health benefits of dates and the respondents answer's options were either yes or no. Reasons why the respondents did not consume dates everyday also were asked. This preliminary study was conducted within 2 months duration from October 2014 to December 2014.

This preliminary survey session will assist to gather more information to build a strong and valid questionnaire to be used for further large scale study. Approval from the Local Head Resident and consent from all the 40 respondents have been obtained.

V. RESULTS

A. Socio-Demographic Characteristics

Table I represents socio-demographics details of the respondents. The mean age was 35.3 years. All respondents were Malay Muslims, more than half of the respondents were females, majority were married and nearly half of them completed college or university education and have an Islamic education background.

TABLE I: SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDENTS (N=40)

Characteristics	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	15	37.0
Female	25	63.0
Age in mean (SD)	35.3(14.0)	-
Religion		

Muslim	40	100
Ethnic		
Malay	40	100
Status		
Married		
Single	29	72
Widowed	8	20
	3	8
Education level		
College/university		
Pre University/STPM	18	45
Secondary	1	3
Primary	17	43
None	3	7
	1	2
Islamic education		
Yes		
No	29	73
	11	27

B. Practice of Dates

Table II shows the frequency of dates consumption among the 40 respondents. Mainly, 35% ($n=7$) of the respondents only consumed dates during Ramadhan only while only 17% ($n=7$) of the respondents consistently consume dates every day.

TABLE II: PRACTICE OF DATES (N=40)

Dates consumption	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Every day	7	17
At least once in a week	4	10
At least once in a month	5	12
At least once in three months	3	8
At least once in six months	4	10
Once in a year or above	2	5
Ramadhan only	14	35
Never	1	3

C. Reasons to Consume Dates

Majority of the respondents ($n=36$) consumed dates since practicing it is considered as *Sunnah* or practiced by the prophet (pbuh). In terms of health benefits, more than half or 60% ($n=24$) of the respondents claimed that they consumed dates to improve memory. Furthermore, more than half of the respondents ($n=22$) claimed that either they or their family members consume dates to facilitate the labor process and very less of them ($n=10$) consumed dates for the purpose of controlling blood pressure as presented in Fig. 1 below.

D. Reasons for not Taking Dates Everyday

Fig. 2 below shows that there are 5 major reasons why the respondents did not consume dates every day. The main reasons are because of forgetfulness, not a habit and less of awareness ($n=10$). The second reason is because dates are not easily accessible and difficult to find during non-Fasting days ($n=9$). Other reasons are due to its sweet taste ($n=8$),

palatability ($n=3$) and expensive ($n=3$).

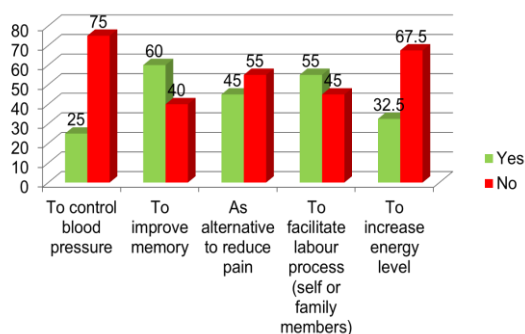


Fig. 1. Health reasons to consume dates ($n=40$).

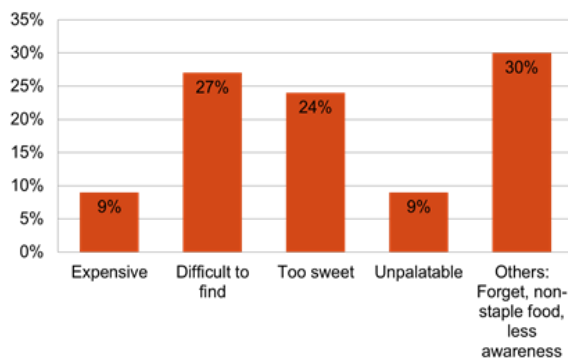


Fig. 2. Reasons for not taking dates everyday ($n=33$).

VI. DISCUSSION

From the results shown in Table II, it can be concluded that the level of practice of dates consumption was still low as only 17% ($n=7$) respondents consume dates every day and 35% ($n=14$) consumed it during Ramadhan. This is due to the increase demands of dates during fasting month, which makes it easily accessible. Narration by Prophet (pbuh) “*He who finds a date, let him break his fast on that. If he finds no date, let him break it on water. For verily that is purity*” [9].

The high demand of dates in Ramadhan does not only happen in Malaysia but other countries too. In UAE, the production of dates increasing every year and the production of dates and demands keep increasing and peak during Ramadhan, the fasting month of Muslim [10]. In Bangalore, India, the sales of dates are increasing, especially during Ramadhan month due to high demands. General Secretary of Russell Market Merchants’ Association Mohammed Idrees Choudry mentioned in New Indian Express that many buyers of the dates are non-Muslims and they chose to consume dates based on doctor’s advice [11]. One study to determine the practice of Sunnah foods among students in International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) found that small numbers of students who came from health related courses believed that dates should not be taken during Ramadhan only. Indeed, the consumption of dates should be practiced throughout the years [12].

In medicine, research studies have shown numerous health benefits and its constituents have been proved to have anti-oxidative, anti-tumour, anti-inflammatory, anti-viral, anti-diarrhea and anti-ulcer effects [13], [14]. In this study, the consumption of dates for the purpose of health benefits is generally for memory improvement, as an alternative way to reduce pain and to facilitate the labor process. Scientifically,

dates have been significantly proved to increase memory in mice due to its anti-mutagenic and anti-oxidative effects [15]. Moreover, the use of dates during *tahnik* or placing sugary substance in the mouth of a newborn has been found to have analgesic effects by reducing the sense of pain and heart rate of the newborn [16]. In terms of the benefits of dates in pregnant women, it was found that dates contain a substance that aids to facilitate the labor process. This substance resembles oxytocin, a hormone released by the anterior pituitary lobe that promotes uterine contraction. Other than that, stimulant contents in dates help in strengthening the uterine wall in the last months of pregnancy. This can support in dilation of uterus in labor and reduces postnatal bleeding [17].

They were fewer respondents who consumed dates for the purpose of increasing their energy level ($n=13$) and controlling blood pressure ($n=10$). A study done in 2005 demonstrated that due to their high carbohydrate content (total sugars, approximately 70-80%) which is easily absorbed by the human body, dates play an essential role as the best source of rapid energy. Moreover, dates are also found to have a protective effect to prevent hypertension [18]. These studies are crucial in conveying the enormous benefits of dates, especially in promoting the public to consume dates every day.

VII. CONCLUSION

Islam is an absolute religion and it covers every aspect of life. Islam stresses the values of health and wellness maintenance either physically, mentally or spiritually. Nowadays, the prevalence of detrimental diseases such as cancer, hypertension and diabetes is primarily due to individual’s diet. Therefore, practicing a healthy eating behavior is one of the crucial foundations to attain a good health, to maintain a pure heart and a sound mind as well as to nourish an aspiring soul and a clean healthy body [19]. This study concludes that the practice of dates is still low among the residents of Kg. Dato’ Ahmad Razali. Moreover, this study suggests the needs of further health education and health promotion to the public, especially among Muslim community to escalate their level of knowledge and attitudes towards prophetic foods as well as to determine the barriers in order to improve the practice of prophetic foods. This will lead to a healthy and productive community.

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