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Editorial Letter



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Rising Energy-Drink Consumption among Iraqi Youth: Is Public-Health Action Keeping Pace?

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Dear Editor-in-Chief

In Iraq, the use of energy drinks seems to have become more common among children, teenagers, college students, athletes, and young people. Public health education, marketing control, and age-specific regulations seem to be lacking, despite several Iraqi studies showing high use and little awareness of product contents and their negative consequences [1–8]. Health authorities, educational institutions, healthcare workers, and researchers should pay more attention to the growing local evidence. The usage of energy drinks varies significantly depending on the people and environment, according to published studies from Iraq. About one-fifth of youngsters in the Diyala Governorate between the ages of six and fifteen allegedly drank energy drinks, and users often did so [1]. Research on college students has often found that the prevalence of consumption ranges from around 25% to over 50% of individuals [2–6]. Over 45% of Alnoor University students who participated in the poll said they drank energy drinks, and 9.3% said they did so at least four times a week [6]. Although intake frequency was not substantially correlated with body mass index or sleep duration in that research, male students ingested them more frequently than female students [6]. A cross-sectional survey of 800 high school pupils in the Erbil Governorate provides the most alarming recent data. 82.1% of respondents reported having drunk energy drinks at least once, and 57.6% reported having done so in the 30 days prior. Adolescent males were much more likely to consume, and after adjustment, gender continued to be an independent predictor [7]. These findings suggest that Iraqi teenagers' usage of energy drinks may be ingrained in their everyday and social lives rather than being an isolated or sporadic behavior. The problem appears to have existed for a long time, according to earlier Iraqi findings. An overall consumption prevalence of 42.7% was found in a population-based survey of 600 adults and adolescents in

Erbil, with 29.8% of females and 55.7% of men [8]. Getting energy and enhancing mood or performance were the main motivations for usage. Although 62.7% of participants thought energy drinks were harmful, they were nonetheless widely consumed [8]. The primary source of advertising exposure was found to be television, indicating the potential significance of commercial messages in influencing consumer knowledge and familiarity with products [8]. Academic pressure, test preparation, exhaustion, social influence, and perceived improvement of focus have all been found to be prevalent causes for consumption in studies conducted among medical and non-medical university students in Baghdad and Mosul [2–5]. Friends were often cited as a valuable source of support or product knowledge [2,3]. While some students were able to identify energy drinks by name, they knew very little about their contents, suggested usage limits, caffeine levels, or potential side effects [3,4]. This disparity between low health literacy and high product knowledge is especially worrisome. Studies from Iraq that are now available have also detailed consumer self-reported symptoms such as palpitations, sleeplessness, agitation, changes in appetite, and shorter sleep duration [1,4]. Short-term metabolic alterations following use of energy drinks have been shown in small experimental trials [9]. However, because many local studies have been cross-sectional, geographically limited, convenience sample-based, or rely on self-reported intake and symptoms, these results should be regarded with caution [1–8]. As a result, they are unable to prove that all observed outcomes were directly caused by energy drinks. However, it is difficult to overlook the uniformity of the consumption pattern among various Iraqi groups. Schoolchildren, teenagers, athletes, and college students frequently use energy drinks to study, exercise, improve their mood, or relieve exhaustion [1–8]. These alleged advantages align with the common advertising strategies

of energy drinks, which often target youth through media, sports affiliations, appealing packaging, and performance-related imagery. In spite of this, prevalence, knowledge, and stated effects have been the main focus of Iraqi studies [1–9]. The content, reach, frequency, and behavioral impact of energy-drink advertising in Iraq are not well studied. Additionally, there is a dearth of published data on the exposure of teenagers to influencer marketing, sports sponsorship, price promotions, product placement close to schools, caffeine and age-warning label clarity, and social media promotion. This is a significant research need in public health and regulation. There are several things to consider. First, energy drinks should clearly and prominently display information about their caffeine content, along with cautions against consumption by youngsters, pregnant women, and those who are sensitive to stimulants. Second, it is necessary to examine sales and marketing initiatives in and around elementary and secondary schools. Third, advertising that links energy drinks to success in school, athletics, or unrestrained physical activity should be closely watched, particularly if they target children. Fourth, schools, colleges, doctors, pharmacists, and nutritionists should offer hands-on instruction that differentiates energy drinks from sports drinks and explains the possible repercussions of heavy or frequent intake. To identify trends across Iraqi governorates and ascertain if advertising exposure is independently linked to commencement, frequency, brand choice, and intentions to maintain consumption, national and multicenter research is also required. Serving size, total caffeine intake, concurrent consumption of several products, timing of usage, and co-drinking with other caffeinated drinks should all be evaluated in future research. Longitudinal designs and objective measurements would improve knowledge of potential health effects. The literature that is now available in Iraq has previously demonstrated that a number of populations, especially young people and adolescents, frequently consume energy drinks [1–8]. Conducting more small-scale prevalence studies shouldn't be the only course of action. Prevention, health literacy, marketing strategies, product labeling, and evidence-based regulation all require more attention. The normalization of energy drink intake

among young Iraqis may continue to surpass public awareness of its possible hazards in the absence of concerted action.

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