

Energy drinks consumption-prevalence, associations, awareness on health risks and its potential relationship with subsequent substance use among residential students in University of Colombo

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Introduction: The global Energy Drink (ED) market is continuously expanding, and the ED market is more often oriented toward youth and young adults. This has raised concerns among healthcare professionals that young adults who consume ED may harm their health. Currently, there is a correlated trend for subsequent substance use with this ED consumption, but it has not been well studied.

Objective: To assess the prevalence of ED consumption, associations, awareness of health-related risks, and its potential association with the use of substances among residential undergraduates at the University of Colombo.

Methods: This study was a descriptive cross-sectional and 361 undergraduates who reside in university hostels were enrolled. An online self-developed, pre-validated questionnaire was distributed to gather information on socio-demographic data, frequency of ED consumption, reasons, and associations behind the consumption, awareness of the negative effects, correlation between ED consumption and subsequent substance use. Data were analyzed to obtain percentages, frequencies and relationships.

Results: 38.8% of participants were males while majority (52.9%) were aged between 23 -25 years. The prevalence of ED consumption was 31% and most were infrequent consumers (47.3%) and the primary reason for consumption was to enjoy the taste. 89.8% of the participants had poor awareness regarding health-related effects. Level of awareness, age, gender, monthly income of the family, academic year, part-time jobs, and sexual activity status ($p < 0.05$) were positively associated with ED consumption. ED consumption was statically significant ($p < 0.05$) with Alcohol, Cigarettes, Cannabis, Marijuana, and Tobacco use.

Conclusions: This study showed a comparatively high incidence of ED intake among undergraduate hostellers of the university. The majority of the hostellers had poor awareness regarding health-related risks linked with ED consumption. The findings of this study demonstrate that consuming ED is a potential risk factor for substance abuse and highlight the necessity of educating young adults about the harmful effects of ED consumption.

Keywords: *Energy drinks, Undergraduate hostellers, Association, Substance use*