Potential public health importance of the oven ready chip

D Rowland, I Roberts

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Background: Chip pan fires are responsible for 25% of fire related injury in the UK, despite government strategies to encourage safer frying. To establish the feasibility of promoting oven ready chips (fries), the residents in a materially deprived ward of London were surveyed.

Sample frame: 1073 of 2145 households participating in a randomised controlled trial.

Results: Approximately half of those surveyed deep fry, mostly chips, fish, and meat. Ownership of ovens and microwaves was high (99% and 80% respectively). Reasons for deep frying included taste (50%), speed (32%), and tradition (25%).

Conclusions: Improving the quality of oven baked alternatives may encourage consumers to change to safer and healthier cooking methods, with potentially important repercussions for public health.

Table 1 Foods deep fried, and reasons given (n=521)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Deep fried foods*</th>
<th>No (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chips</td>
<td>465 (89)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meat/fish</td>
<td>350 (67)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhaji</td>
<td>111 (21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vegetables</td>
<td>4 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasons for frying*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taste</td>
<td>263 (50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quick and easy</td>
<td>166 (32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>128 (25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>9 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7 (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Not mutually exclusive.

COMMENT

Almost half of the surveyed households deep fried, some on a daily basis, with the majority frying chips. Taste and ease of cooking were the most commonly cited reasons for deep frying. It would appear that the choice was not governed by a lack of access to kitchen appliances such as freezers, ovens, and microwaves.

In disadvantaged communities such as the one surveyed, occupants are at high risk of domestic fires. Despite high profile government campaigns, chip pan fires continue to be the single largest cause of fatalities in house fires. Changing cooking behaviour in low income households may be feasible if the alternatives provide the same quality and convenience as home fried food and at an acceptable price. Food manufacturers should be encouraged to produce tasty, easy to cook versions of current products on the market, while keeping the costs to consumers at a minimum. With coronary heart disease a leading cause of death within the UK, promoting a lower fat alternative to the deep fried chip has added health benefits. A potential decrease in the numbers choosing to deep fry, alongside alternative fire prevention strategies (for example, pan design, labelling of flammable oils) may have important repercussions for public health in the UK.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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REFERENCES


LACUNAE

“Warning: life is dangerous”

Councillor George Newhouse suggests a sign in place of lifeguards, after Australia’s Supreme Court ordered a city council to pay $2m ($US1.1m) to a swimmer who was paralysed in a diving accident in a patrolled area of Bondi Beach, Sydney (Far Eastern Economic Review, May 2002).

Fines on ability to pay?

It has long been a concern that road related fines have a disproportionate affect on low income individuals and little effect on high income individuals. The following report presents a story from Finland where fines are scaled according to ability to pay, leading to cases where individuals have been fined US$50,000 for speeding.

At 46 miles an hour, he didn’t set any land speed records. But Nokia executive Anssa Vanjoki could set the record for the costliest ever speeding ticket—a $103,000 fine. He was fined for speeding on a motorcycle in a 31 mph zone on an island near Helsinki last October, chief police inspector Olli Yliskoski said.

In Finland, traffic fines are not just based on the seriousness of the infringement, they’re also tied to the offender’s income, and there’s no limit. Worse for Vanjoki, his fine was based on his net income in 1999, when he reportedly made $5.2 million because of option sales. He has appealed for the fine to be based on his lower year 2000 income.

In a similar incident last year, a Helsinki court slashed a traffic fine levied against internet millionaire Jaakko Rysola for switching lanes too often. It was cut from $45,000 to $119 after his income showed a dramatic drop. Earlier, Rysola paid a $74,600 traffic fine, reportedly the highest ever in Finland.

Yliskoski said Finnish authorities are considering changing the way incomes are used in determining the fines. “They should be proportioned to the danger afflicted”, he said. “If you fine somebody on the grounds of incomes peaking a certain year it can grow unreasonable” (based on www.newsjournalonline.com/2002/Jan/16/NOTE1.htm; Daytona Beach News Journal, January 2002).
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