



Food Waste in Iran: Time to Return to the Islamic Perspective about Frugality

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ARTICLE INFO

<i>Article type:</i>	<i>Article History:</i>
Letter to the editor	Received: 12 Feb 2019
	Accepted: 16 Feb 2019
	Published: 09 Mar 2019

► *Please cite this paper as:*

Kalateh Sadati A. Food Waste in Iran: Time to Return to the Islamic Perspective about Frugality. J Nutrition Fasting Health. 2018; 6(4): 220-221. DOI: 10.22038/jnfh.2019.38397.1175

Dear editor

The Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (UN) has emphasized on the lack of balance between hunger and food production, declaring that food production has exceeded the limits throughout the world (1). It is estimated that one-third of the foods that are produced in the world for human consumption (approximately 1.3 billion tones) is lost or wasted each year (2). Inefficiency and loss in agricultural production and consumer behaviors play a pivotal role in food waste (4). With regard to consumer behaviors, Aktas et al. investigated the effects of food choice motives, financial attitudes, planning routines, social relations, food surplus, and Ramadan fasting (Islamic fasting) on food waste by consumers (5). Moreover, Farr-Wharton et al. have emphasized on food shopping as the main cause of food waste (6), while Schanes et al. have stated that food waste is a complex and multifaceted issue, which cannot be attributed to a single variable (7).

Sociologically, a few number of research areas are available to social scientists in terms of food waste (8). In Iran, it is estimated that food waste is equal to 10 European countries (9) which is the big problem (3). This qualitative study was conducted in Yazd University, Iran during September 2018-January 2019. Data were collected using a questionnaire consisting of 70 open-ended items entitled 'what are the causes of food waste behaviors in Iranian consumers?'. In addition, two focused group discussions with this question were held among the university students in accordance with ethical consideration. Data analysis was performed using conventional content analysis.

One of the respondents believed that they do not waste food, remarking: "*We do not have adequate food to eat; how could we waste it?*". However, the other respondents believed in food waste although they attempted to highlight poor food quality in Iran. From this perspective, for example, they referred to the main cause of food waste was reported to be the low quality of the prepared foods. Furthermore, the poor

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quality of raw materials was considered to be another cause of this issue.

About the first open-ended item in the questionnaire was '*Why do we have a high rate of food waste in the world?*'. In this regard, several respondents emphasized on the cultural problems associated with food waste. According to the findings, the main cause of food waste in Iran is the Iranian culture, which is highly devoted to the daily consumption of food. In addition, four major dimensions were explored, including *cultural lag*, *luxury-oriented behaviours*, *negative habits*, and *superficiality*. Many participants believed that no one said them about limitation of resources. In addition, an important point is that food waste roots in our families' culture which is severely luxury oriented.

According to our study in this regard, the Iranian culture is dominated by luxury-oriented behaviors in families. Correspondingly, Iranian families run extravagant ceremonies where large portions of food are often wasted. The results of the mentioned research are consistent with the findings of Sokootifar, which indicated that food purchase is higher than necessary despite food prices, processing, preservation, and packaging (10). In addition, Teyfuri and Rastegary have stated that consumerism is the main cause of food waste in Iran (3).

Historically, it seems that the formation of the Rentier state based on oil sale (11) is associated with this cultural change, leading to the formation of hidden concepts unconsciously, such as '*We have oil, and thus, we have everything*'. However, it must be noted that food sources as other resources such as water and energy are currently limited in the world. Therefore, Islamic values could be helpful in this regard since any kind of waste is condemned in the Islamic culture. These values rejected all types of waste in every situation. Yasini believes that living an extravagant life is a sign of ungratefulness to Allah (SWT) for His bounties, which is contrary to the basic principles of Islam (12). Moreover, the findings of Aktas et al. have indicated that as an Islamic ritual, Ramadan could positively influence consumer behaviors

regarding food waste (5). Therefore, it is suggested that Islamic values be further instigated for the proper management of food waste.

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