

Ramadan Bazaar and Ramadan Buffets: The Possible Influence on Eating Behavior and Health among Malaysian Muslims

Hamid Jan Jan Mohamed*, Nurul Hidayah Nazri, See-Ling Loy

Nutrition Program, School of Health Sciences, University Sains Malaysia, Kubang Kerian 16150, Kelantan, Malaysia

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p><i>Article type:</i> Original article</p> <hr/> <p><i>Article History:</i> Received: 14 Jul 2013 Revised: 22 Jul 2013 Accepted: 26 Jul 2013 Published: 25 Dec 2013</p> <hr/> <p><i>Keywords:</i> Diet Eating behavior Fasting</p>	<p>Ramadan is one of the special months for Muslims all over the world. During Ramadan, able-bodied Muslims are abstained from eating, drinking and even smoking from dawn to sunset. In Malaysia, the duration of fasting are normally around 13 hours at any time of the year as it is located near the equator. The altered food intake timing and long period of fasting do influence on eating behavior of fasting individuals. This is especially on those who do not know the right meals to eat during the time of breakfast. Hence, this issue may favor those intended to organize Ramadan Bazaar along the streets and Ramadan buffets in hotels. The implications of these two phenomena which create an abundant food environment may lead to food wasting, binge eating and overeating. However, this may benefit the country's economy; the Muslims need to be mindful that Ramadan is a month of moderation. Hence, the food carnivals during Ramadan need to be observed wisely for the benefit of the ritual and in point of view of population health.</p>

► Please cite this paper as:

Hamid Jan JM, Nurul Hidayah N, Loy SL. Ramadan Bazaar and Ramadan Buffets: The Possible Influence on Eating Behavior and Health among Malaysian Muslims. *J Fasting Health*. 2013; 1(2):43-45.

Introduction

Malaysia, a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country, is located in the South East Asia Region. The population of this country predominantly consists of Malays (51%), Chinese (27%), Indians (8%) and indigenous peoples who make up the rest. By religion, it consists of Muslim (62%), Buddhist (20%), Christian (9%) and Hindu (6%) (1).

Owing to the rapid economic development, Malaysia is now at an upper-middle income status (2). This country has experienced rapid socioeconomic advancement and urbanization especially since 1990's. These have led to significant changes in lifestyles of families and communities in general. One of the implications is the nutritional transition where dietary patterns of the population have transformed significantly from traditional to westernized diets. Meal patterns have also altered where

foods are mostly bought as takeaway meal or consumed in food premises with family and friends. Gradually the diminishing of traditional ways of preparing food at home is attributable to stressful and busy life schedule (3).

The nutrition transition has also influenced the patterns of meal consumption during the holy month of Ramadan. Dietary modifications such as changes in the frequency of meals, foods preferences, preparation of foods and dietary habits has happened during Ramadan. Due to the busy lifestyle and overwhelming demand for prepared food, business minded people has tapped into this need by creating a 'food abundant' environment. On top of increased religious activities, two most distinctive phenomena that appear in the month of Ramadan in many Islamic countries including Malaysia are the 'Ramadan Bazaar' and 'Ramadan Buffet'.

* *Corresponding author:* Hamid Jan Jan Mohamed, Nutrition Program, School of Health Sciences, University Sains Malaysia, Kubang Kerian 16150, Kelantan, Malaysia. Tel: +609 7677618; Fax: +609 7677515; Email: hamidjan@kb.usm.my

© 2013 *mums.ac.ir* All rights reserved.

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Ramadan bazaar

Ramadan bazaar is a kind of street food market established in busy areas only during the Ramadan month. Normally, it consists of stalls that sell foods and drinks operated from 3.00 pm (after zohor) until 8.00 p.m. (before Ishaq) by those interested to do this business. However, the sellers need to apply for bazaar permission from the local council which is advertised around one month prior to start of the fasting month. Ideally, the bazaar may provide opportunity to the Muslim food sellers who have to close their business from dusk till afternoon.

While it gives an excellent opportunity for business minded people, it also provides opportunity for the public and tourists to buy variety of Malaysian cuisine and local foods, such as nasi lemak, briyani rice, laksa, roasted chicken, satay, sugarcane juice, soybean milk and others. The Ramadan bazaar does not only attract Muslims who normally fast for around 13 hours per day, but also people from any other religions. In fact, the Ramadan Bazaar is also included in the Malaysian Tourism Agency calendar as an annual event (4).

Malaysia is currently first ranked in the South-east Asia region regarding the prevalence of obesity (5). Undoubtedly, fasting in Ramadan is a great chance to achieve better health c by reducing the frequency and quantity of food intake, which may contribute to weight loss and favorable metabolic changes (6, 7). However, such chance of weight loss during Ramadan might be missed with the launch of Ramadan Bazaar and new eating habit changes. Many people, in general, tend to overspend time on purchasing more foods in the bazaar and overeat upon breaking their fast. Usually these meals are heavy, fatty and high in calories. Adherence to this unhealthy dietary practice is likely to weight gain after Ramadan. A recent study which conducted among Saudi Muslims in

Jeddah has shown fasting in Ramadan was positively associated with weight gain but not weight loss (8).

Ramadan buffet

There are some differences between Ramadan bazaar and Ramadan buffet as shown in Table 1. While the Ramadan bazaar caters 'takeaway food' for people from all levels of economy, the Ramadan buffet is normally favored by those in the higher economic classes. This is mainly due to the higher prices of the hotelier and exclusive restaurants. The cost per person may range from USD 20 to USD 50 depending on the class of hotel and the size of menu options. The meals may include varieties of local, Western, Middle Eastern, Indian and other Asian foods.

Normally, the buffet duration is between dawns (7pm) until (9 pm). Similar to the Ramadan bazaar, the Ramadan buffet attracts not only the Muslims but also people with other religions. Some corporate agencies do also take this opportunity to support their employees and clients by sponsoring them for the buffet.

The so called "buffet syndrome" with the concept of "all-you-can-eat" is detrimental to health as the consumer will tend to overeat, to justify the money that they shall pay regardless of amount of eaten food and also to fulfill their appetite. During the Ramadan buffet, this syndrome becomes worse as the short meal period (around two hours) and the necessity for Maghrib prayer in between may cause the consumer to binge eating. Particularly, those with type II diabetes and hypertension are at higher risk of the surge of glucose and sodium that is highly detrimental to their health.

Recommendations

Few previous studies have reported that modifications of the eating pattern during the modifications of the eating pattern during the fasting in Ramadan could result in weight loss

Table 1. Differences between Ramadan bazaar and Ramadan buffet

Ramadan bazaar	Ramadan buffet
Takeaway food	Dine in food
All level of economy class customer	High economy class customer
Longer/flexible meal time at home	Short meal time at hotel/restaurant
Less healthy food choices	May include healthier food choices
Can cause overeating	Can cause binge and overeating

and help to reduce the complications of obesity by controlling the atherogenic lipid profiles (6, 7). Theoretically, Ramadan fasting is a good model for health promotion (8) however; these beneficial effects will only be achieved with the practice of discipline in food intake that be maintained throughout whole of the month.

Several tips can be used in order to keep the Ramadan bazaar survived. While there are many food stalls and foods providers in the bazaar, people are encouraged to limit the number of food stalls to be bought and limit the choices of the foods to be purchased each time daily. Also, it is better to bring a definite amount of money for shopping in order to avoid overspending which mostly ends up by overeating or wasting the rest of the unconsumed foods (9). Generally the concept of taking more foods at night to better be able to compensate the fasting period should change.

Quality and quantity of food during Ramadan should not differ significantly with a healthy normal diet. While facing Ramadan buffets which provide a wide variety of foods, it is highly important not to overindulge. Keeping a balanced meal, eating slowly and moderation are always the golden tips to enjoy the buffet without unhealthy risks. However, education of local community that buffet eating should not be accompanied by more food intake is a greater challenge. The gap between knowledge and practice should be filled by more nutritional modifications and health promotion programs (8). Moreover, more efforts are required to study the risks of changing the fasting month of Ramadan from a month of fasting to an 'overeating' month.

Conclusion

Undeniably, the Ramadan bazaar and buffet provide a great opportunity to the country's economy. However, from the religious point of view, these issues may result in squander as the consumers may tend to purchase food unnecessarily which eventually leads to food wasting. Furthermore, from the nutritionist point of view, the Ramadan bazaars create a food fiesta which may contribute to binge eating and

overeating. Sadly, the practice of moderation during Ramadan will be spoilt by such acts. Hence, the Muslims should restrain their eating appetite by maintaining moderation during *Iftar* as this is not only important for their ritual (*Ibadah*) but also for their health.

References

1. Department of Statistics Malaysia. Population distribution and basic demographic characteristics. The 2000 Population and Housing Census of Malaysia. Putrajaya: Department of Statistics; 2000.
2. The World Bank. Data: Malaysia. 2013. Available at: <http://data.worldbank.org/country/Malaysia>. Accessed July 11, 2013.
3. Sidik SM, Rampal L. The prevalence and factors associated with obesity among adult women in Selangor, Malaysia. *Asia Pac Fam Med*. 2009; 8(1): 1-6.
4. Tourism Malaysia. Events and festivals: Ramadan Bazaar. 2013. Available at: <http://www.tourism.gov.my/en/Master/Web-Page/Events-n-Festivals/2013/7/Ramadan-Bazaar>. Accessed July 10, 2013.
5. Swinburn B. WHO Collaborating Centre for Obesity Prevention: Annual Report, 2009-2010. Geneva: WHO Collaborating Centre for Obesity Prevention; 2009.
6. Sadiya A, Ahmed S, Siddieg HH, Babas IJ, Carlsson M. Effect of Ramadan fasting on metabolic markers, body composition, and dietary intake in Emiratis of Ajman (UAE) with metabolic syndrome. *Diabetes Metab Syndr Obes*. 2011; 4: 409-16.
7. Shehab A, Abdulle A, El Issa A, Al Suwaidi J, Nagelkerke N. Favorable changes in lipid profile: the effects of fasting after Ramadan. *PLoS One*. 2012; 7(10): e47615.
8. Bakhotmah BA. The puzzle of self-reported weight gain in a month of fasting (Ramadan) among a cohort of Saudi families in Jeddah, Western Saudi Arabia. *Nutr J*. 2011; 10: 84.
9. Malaysian Dietitians' Association. Five tips to survive the Ramadan Bazaars. 2013. Available at: <http://dietitians.org.my/health-information/food-nutrition/5-tips-to-survive-the-ramadan-bazaars/>. Accessed July 11, 2013.