

Indonesian Adolescents' Perceptions of Front-of-Package Labels on Packaged Foods and Drinks

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Objectives: The objective of this study was to compare the perceived effectiveness of 3 front-of-package label (FOPL) types in helping Indonesian adolescents i. identify unhealthy foods, and ii. discourage consumption of unhealthy foods.

Methods: In June 2021, we conducted 8 focus group discussions (FDGs) with adolescents 12–18 years of age from Greater Jakarta (n = 46 adolescents). FDGs were stratified by gender and socioeconomic status (high/middle vs low). We reviewed 3 types of FOPLs - i. the traffic light label (TLL), ii. warning label, and iii. a healthier choice logo, which appears on selected product categories in Indonesia. Specifically, adolescents reflected on the visibility and memorability of FOPLs, comprehension and perceived effectiveness of the labels. FDGs were analysed using data-driven inductive thematic analysis approach.

Results: Participants characterized the warning label and TLL as memorable and visible, while the healthier choice icon was found to be the least visible, interesting or attractive of the labels. In general, participants understood the warning label and healthier choice logo, while some, particularly those from lower socioeconomic status (SES), did not understand the numeric information or meaning of the TLL colors. Opinions about whether the warning would change snack purchasing behavior were mixed, with some reporting that the warning would discourage them from buying unhealthy snacks and others conveying that it would not influence their food choices. Similarly, some reported that the TLL would make them 'stop and think', but not necessarily influence their purchasing behaviours. Adolescents considered that both TLL and warning labels were relevant for those who are concerned about their health, not them. Some participants appreciated the positive nature of the healthier choice logo and noted that it could help them identify healthy product. However, it was generally agreed that it would not influence their behaviour.

Conclusions: TLL and warning labels hold promise for helping adolescents identify unhealthy foods and discourage purchases of these products. Future research is needed to understand whether FOPLS would actually impact adolescents' food purchasing behaviours and whether there are differences by gender or SES.

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