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Food and Substance Addiction Control and Policies: An *halalan-toyyiban* Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Noncommunicable diseases such as diabetes, cancer, and heart disease are amongst top public health threats facing the world. These diseases have been linked to excessive consumption of sugar, cigarette and other substance addictions or abuse. Prevalence and higher rates of NCD are recorded in developing countries where most Muslim countries feature. This calls for concerns considering that Islam offers unique solutions to every challenge of life with comprehensive principles that stipulates a dietary and consumption system aimed at achieving ethical, healthy and wholesome consumption. Many countries have domesticated World Health Organisation (WHO) recommended public health policies to control consumptions that causes deadly diseases. Some of these policies are based and shaped by secular, Western or Non-Muslim values, cultures and perspectives. However, many studies have emphasised importance of health strategies that are faith based or culturally-relevant. In view of prevalence of public health problems associated with obesity and poor dietary patterns in Muslim communities, this mini review aims to examine the issues of food and substance addictions, public health policies and ethics from *halalan-toyyiban* perspectives.

Keywords: Halal; *toyyiban*; Food addiction; Substance abuse; Public health; Health control; Policies; Ethics

1 Introduction

Topping the list of most ravaging public health threats facing the world according to WHO (after air pollution) is noncommunicable diseases such as diabetes, cancer, and heart disease [1, 2]. These illnesses are not only causing more than 70% of deaths worldwide but sometimes exacerbate mental health issues among young people leading to suicide [1]. Studies have also linked this non-communicable diseases and mental illnesses to excessive consumption of sugar, cigarette and other substance addictions or abuse [3-5]. Moreover, non-communicable diseases which disproportionately affect low- and middle-income countries [1] have also been recording higher rates in developing countries where most Muslim countries feature [5-7]. This calls for concerns considering that Islam being a complete way of life with unique solutions to every challenges of life has comprehensive principles that stipulates a dietary and consumption system aimed at achieving ethical, healthy and wholesome consumption [8-10]. According to findings, foods, eating, water/drinking words and their derivatives are repeated



171, 109, and 131 times in the *Qur'an*, respectively [9]. The dietary system of Islam is aimed at optimising spiritual, intellectual, psychological and physiological wellbeing of man [10]. Also, Islam places high priority on protection and preservation of public interest (*Maslaha*) which is saddled on government and individuals. World Health Organisation (WHO) recommended various public health measures and policies to control consumptions that causes deadly diseases. Many countries have either domesticated these policies or evoked different ones that are shaped by their peculiar cultures or national philosophies. However, some of these policies have always been designed, measured and subjected to Western or Non-Muslim values, cultures and perspective. According to [6] many studies have emphasised importance of health strategies and interventions that are culturally-relevant, populations and communities tailored. Also, due to prevalence and widespread of public health problems associated with obesity and poor dietary patterns in Muslim communities, some studies have proposed faith-based health, dietary and physical activity approaches applicable to Muslim populations [6]. Hence, this article aims to examine the issues of food and substance addictions, existing public health policies and ethics from *halalan toyyiban* perspectives. Reviews of articles and different policies designed to control food and substance abuse will be carried out while offering *halalan-toyyiban* perspectives to bridge the gaps in the existing public health policies.

2 Halalan-Toyyiban Concept

According to [11], halal means the lawful or that which is permitted, Allah has allowed it's doing and no restriction exists with respect to it. *Al-haram* which literally means the prohibited or unlawful is that which the Law-Giver (Allah) has absolutely prohibited; anyone who engages in it is liable to incur the punishment of Allah in the Hereafter as well as a legal punishment in this world. In the *Qur'an* Allah addresses all human beings to consume halal and wholesome foods with the following verse and other three similar ones: "*O mankind, eat from whatever is on earth [that is] lawful and good and do not follow the footsteps of Satan. Indeed, he is to you a clear enemy*" (al-*Qur'an* 2:168). *Halalan-toyyiban* is a combination of halal and *toyyib*. According to [12] while *halalan-toyyiban* means something lawful and good the meaning of halal precludes something that brings goodness and does not bring any harm. It is argued that halal is a decision made under Islamic law while *toyyib* is proof brought forward by someone.

3 Ethical Issues in Public Health, Foods and Substances Addiction Control

3.1 Secular, Conventional or Western Approach

Concept or definition of addictive substances has over the time been based on intensity of the intoxication syndrome (e.g., how high someone gets), the severity of the withdrawal symptoms, and the illegality of the substance [13]. According to [14] there is no consensus on the term food addiction amongst experts and some of them believe the practicality of the term 'food addiction' in humans remains at preliminary phase of scientific research hence requiring

further experiments. However, systematic reviews suggest the possibility of the existence of a “food addiction” phenomenon (including sugar addiction) and this is giving insight into new strategies to deal with obesity and overeating [14].

For instance, [13] argues that nicotine addiction is different from alcohol’s in term of intoxication and its mind-altering capability “(e.g., you can legally drive your car while smoking), nicotine withdrawal is relatively mild (it is not life-threatening nor does it require hospitalization), and nicotine is legal to procure and use in most cases”. Nevertheless, it is generally accepted that nicotine is not only dangerous but also an addictive substance and this acknowledgement has substantially reshaped scientific and public perceptions of addiction [13]. Intoxication and physical dependence still remain important features of addiction but the new focus on addiction highlights the importance of other components. Hence, stemming from the new shift in addiction understanding is a hypothesis that ultra-processed foods (often high in sugar) may be capable of triggering an addictive process.

3.2 Halalan-Toyyiban Approach

However, this dichotomy of perspectives on addictions and ethical consumptions of certain foods or substances are not limited to secular western circle but also exist amongst Islamic scholars. While intoxicant is prohibited in Islam without any controversy based on explicit texts of the *Qur’an*, there is diverse opinions amongst Islamic scholars on prohibition or permissibility of smoking. In determining the prohibitions or otherwise of foods and substances, the first fundamental principle established by Islam is:

“that the things which Allah has created and the benefits derived from them are essentially for man’s use, and hence are permissible. Nothing is haram except what is prohibited by a sound and explicit *nas* - a verse of the *Qur’an* or a clear, authentic, and explicit sunnah (practice or saying) of Prophet Muhammad.” [11].

As a result of this principle religious scholars differ on their rulings on smoking. Those who view smoking as useful uphold its permissibility while others who view smoking as harmful or not useful concluded that it is haram [15]. It can be summarily deduced from different opinions of Islamic scholars that smoking is permissible except in certain circumstances. It is prohibited or reprehensive based on causal severe damages to health and wealth, in the mosque or while reading the *Qur’an* which violate reverence to Allah [15]. This can also be said to agree with *toyyiban* aspect of *halalan-toyyiban* concept and practices. Though the *Qur’an* does not specifically prohibit or denounce smoking, but gives behavioral guidance such as: “Don’t throw yourself into danger by your own hands...” (Al-Baqarah 2:195); “You may eat, drink, but not waste” (Al-A’raf 7:31); “Do not kill yourselves for God Almighty is most merciful to you” (An-Nisa 4:29).

Similarly, other foods and substances addiction like excessive sugar consumptions can be approached from *halalan-toyyiban* perspective. Islam unequivocally frowned at excesses in all

consumptions due to harms it portends for human life. Hence, If it is correct that one of the harmful things is to eat food on top of other food, then it is haram [16]. Experts agree that the calories contained in Sugar Sweetened Beverages (SSBs) provide little to no nutritional value and less satiety, as compared to solid food and SSB intake leads to unhealthy weight gain due to high total energy intake, with little nutritional value [14], [17]. High availability of SSBs have contributed to Malaysian's rising health problems such as diabetes, obesity and other non-communicable diseases [3]. Islam highly recommends that food is of higher nutritional value and a pure nature denoted in the statement of Imam Mālik as food enjoyed by one who eats lawful foods without any expression of detest in any way [16].

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