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How do citizens perceive the presence of toxic artificial substances to foods and their health risks?



A study by IMIM and the UAB has investigated the factors that influence the perception of citizen about who are responsible for the presence of toxic substances in food, on the application of the laws aspire to control human exposure to these substances in Spain and about the effectiveness of these laws.

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The study has analyzed the influence of these perceptions on factors such as gender, the degree of information on the subject, the level of studies, the ability to identify health problems associated with toxic substances or the degree of toxicity of certain substances.

In Spain there are very few in-depth studies on the perceptions, attitudes and behaviors of citizens about the presence of these contaminants in food. The study carried out now is based on an online survey responded by 740 people from different areas of Spain, with an average age of 47 years; 67% were women and 70% had university studies. It is not a representative sample of the Spanish population, and strictly only valid for people similar to those who participated.

The results show a broad skepticism and mistrust regarding the application and effectiveness of the legislation that aims to control the human exposure to toxic substances in food in Spain. Only 47% of men and 34% of women said that laws are often applied; 27% and 11%, respectively, believed that the laws were effective, they worked.

The women and participants who identified more groups of foods with potentially toxic concentrations were the least likely to respond that legal regulations on toxic substances to food are effective.

Men and women, regardless of their studies, have a very similar level of information on the subject. Men were less likely to identify health problems associated with toxic substances, but responded better to the degree of toxicity of certain substances.

More than 87% of respondents considered it possible to have accumulated potentially dangerous toxic substances in their body for their health throughout their lives.

The attribution of responsibility over the presence of these substances to 6 or more of the 8 social groups that were considered (and ranging from the production and distribution of food to public administrations and the media) was more frequent among people who consulted more often about the problem; That correctly identified more factors that increase the likelihood that toxic substances to food are harmful to human health; They knew better the health problems that these substances cause and that they indicated more groups of foods that tend to have concentrations of potentially harmful toxins for health.

The authors believe that the results should reflect the authorities linked to food safety, public health and the environment, as well as to citizen organizations, other institutions and food companies.

The article has a podcast on the web of the magazine:

http://www.elsevier.es/ficheros/publicaciones/02139111/unassign/S021391117301292/v1_201706280102/en/main.assets/mmc3.mp3

Jose Pumarega

jpumarega@imim.es

Hospital del Mar Medical Research Institute (IMIM)

Miquel Porta Serra

miquel.porta@uab.cat

Researcher and professor of public health

Hospital del Mar Medical Research Institute (IMIM)

Faculty of Medicine, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

References

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