Perception of people using Rock Salt (Sendha Namak) residing in hilly city of Himachal Pradesh, India

Abstract: Dietary salt plays a very crucial role in maintaining human health. Faulty salt intake practices are deeply associated with many health related problems. Despite significant progress has been made by the government through the supply of iodized salt at every level, some households in this hilly region of Himachal Pradesh still use Rock Salt/ Sendha Namak in place of iodized salt. The present editorial explains the reasons and perception of the people for using Rock Salt.

Keywords: Rock Salt/ Sendha Namak, hilly region, health problems

INTRODUCTION
Dietary salt plays a very crucial role in maintaining human health (https://manoa.hawaii.edu). Faulty salt intake Practices are very much associated with many health related problems (www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au). The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends that a person should not consume more than 2 grams of sodium per day, which is about 5 grams of salt (just under a teaspoon) per day (www.heart.org). It is also recommended that salt which is to be consumed should be iodized or “fortified” with iodine, for healthy brain development in the foetus and young child, for maintaining proper thyroid function & cell metabolism and further preventing hypothyroidism, congenital anomalies, cretinism or endemic goitre (www.who.int).

With this background, a study was carried out by Community Medicine Department, Indira Gandhi Medical College, Shimla in collaboration with NHM Himachal Pradesh to assess the pattern of salt consumption, coverage of adequately iodized salt, storage & cooking practices with respect to the current use of salt and further assessing the knowledge regarding benefits of iodized salt use, iodine deficiency diseases & associated factors at household level in Solan city. A Total of 402 households from all 15 wards of municipal corporation area of Solan City were surveyed.

Rock salt consumption
In the survey we found that 2.5% of households in this hilly region of Himachal Pradesh still use rock salt (Popularly known as Sendha Namak) in place of iodized salt. Most of these households used sendha namak because it was prescribed or advised to them by their treating physician/medical officers/ quacks or their family & friends. Other reasons put forward by respondents for consuming rock salt/Sendha Namak were their perception that it has a variety of beneficial uses such as it helps in stabilizing blood pressure, controlling blood sugar level and helps in alleviating joints pain. Some respondents also enumerated that its consumption pacifies heartburn, relieves bloating, improves appetite and helps in proper digestion.

Some respondents quoted as
“It has fewer impurities than white salt”
“My blood pressure has been under control since we start using Sendha Namak,”
“White salt is not good for health.”
“Taste of Sendha Namak is far better than white salt”
“It helps in control of blood pressure and diabetes”
“Sendha Namak helps in proper digestion of food and prevents acidity”
“My throat pain gets relieved if I do gargles using sendha namak” ”
“We are using a mixture of iodised salt and Sendha Namak as it tastes better”.

One female respondent was having a misconception that Sendha Namak is useful in treating hypothyroidism. She has been using Sendha Namak for last 2 years although she was a patient of hypothyroidism.

**CONCLUSION**

There is no scientific evidence which elucidates that rock salt provides more health benefits than regular table salt till date. Both types of salt (iodized salt & rock salt) consist of approximately 98 percent sodium chloride, which means that only around 2 percent part in Sendha Namak is made up of various trace minerals (www.medicalnewstoday.com; & www.medicalnewstoday.com). This finding suggests that there is no/minimal role of Sendha Namak in controlling the blood pressure.

Although rock salt may naturally contain some iodine but its concentration is less as compared to iodized salt (0.1g/kg in rock salt and 0.20-0.25g/kg in iodized salt) (Sarker, A. et al., 2016; & Importance of Iodine in our Diet http://tatasalt.com). Therefore, those people who have iodine deficiency or are at risk of deficiency need rich source of iodine to overcome their deficiency. This issue should be addressed with proper advocacy by health department.

**Recommendation**

Mass media approach along with other modes of health education should emphasize on importance of iodized salt in our diet. Medical officers/Ayush doctors/health care personnel should be trained about iodine deficiency disorders along with role and importance of iodized salt on health, so that they can avoid disseminating the false or unproved facts about rock salt to public. Government should start public awareness campaign to increase the knowledge about benefits of iodized salt and clear the myths about rock salt or Sendha Namak.

**Author Contributions**

All authors equally contributed to this editorial with conception design, drafting, critical revision, editing and final approval of the final version.

**Acknowledgments**

Authors would like to acknowledge the support and co-operation of National Health Mission, Government of Himachal Pradesh for providing all financial and logistic assistance and other support to carry out the study smoothly.

**Conflicts of Interest**

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

**REFERENCES**

3. Leonard J. Does pink Himalayan salt have any health benefits? Available at: https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/315081.php(Assessed on 30/08/2019)
8. World health organization. Available at: https://www.who.int/nutrition/publications/micronutrients/iodine_deficiency/WHO_NUT_96.13/en/(Assessed on 28/08/2019)