

Dangers posed by UPFs require global policy action, 43 top researchers say

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The increase in the consumption of ultra-processed foods (UPFs) requires awareness raising and decisive policy actions, according to a series of three scientific articles published in the prestigious The Lancet medical journal. This series of three articles reflects the work, based on a meta-analysis of epidemiological data, of 43 international experts, including Carlos Monteiro, from Sao Paulo University, who created the concept of ultra-processed foods.

Although this is not the first study of this kind, after the recent publication of a first meta-analysis study, the present study has found new signs about the health risks posed by UPFs.

According to Monteiro, the aggressive marketing of UPFs by corporations is leading to a worrying dietary shift, worldwide, leading to an increase in diet-related chronic diseases. In the last decades, the share of caloric intake from UPFs has gone over 50% in the US and the UK, it has doubled in Mexico and Brazil (10% to 23%), and in China (4% to 10%); and it has tripled in Spain (10% to 32%).

Deputy Director of SAFE Luigi Tozzi said: "This is a real change in the perception of the public risks posed by UPFs. There are more and more indications, based on meta-analysis data that point at UPFs and their health impact. This new meta-analysis study confirms the findings of the previous one. The conclusion is clear: we must adapt our public health policies to the evidence provided by science to protect all consumers, especially the most vulnerable."

The authors call for large-scale epidemiological studies and for precautionary measures, including front-of-package labelling requirements, until sufficient evidence is gathered.

Mathilde Touvier, from French National Institute of Health and Medical Investigation (Inserm) said: "The current scientific debate on UPFs must be clearly distinguished from the attempts to discredit the existing evidence by interest groups".

Professor Karen Hoffman, from Witwatersrand University, in South Africa, insisted on

the need for a global coordinated response for the threat posed by UPFs, in a similar way to the opposition shown by medicine professionals to the tobacco industry in past decades.