

Note: This statement was passed before the organisation's name change from Medsin-UK to Students for Global Health. The statement will still remain active for three years.

Vegetarianism and Veganism

Introduction

Medsin is committed to advocating for methods that tackle the inequalities caused by the social determinants of health. This includes the devastating impact that inadequate nutrition can have on people who do not have access to adequate education, nutritional information or healthy foods. It also includes the cumulative impact that agriculture and climate change has on the earth and the consequences that arise from this. Because of the aforementioned reasons, it is important that Medsin addresses the subject of vegetarianism and veganism and the positive impact that these dietary changes can have on global issues.

Main Text

According to the National Archives Statistics of the United Kingdom, the leading cause of death (12.1%) is ischaemic heart disease (IHD)(1). The second most prevalent cause of death was cardiovascular disease. Both these diseases can be controlled and prevented by diet (2, 3). However, it has been found that people in the UK still consume too many saturated fats, sugars and salts and not enough fruit, vegetables and fibre (4). Only 30% of adults, aged 19 to 64, met their government target of consuming 5 portions of fruit and vegetables per day. This percentage was significantly lower in children - only 10% of boys and 7% of girls met their "5-a-day" requirements. This data highlights the problem with the average diet in the UK and it goes to show that attitudes towards, and choices of, food for the average UK resident, and the inequity in healthy food choices available, is an area that needs addressing.

Multiple studies have shown the benefits of individuals adopting vegetarian or vegan diets. One study has shown how the consumption of meat is positively associated with higher levels of total cholesterol and unhealthy LDL-cholesterol (5). The study also found that non-meat-eaters had lower incidences of all causes of death - including IHD and cancer. Another study found that, not only do vegetarians and vegans eat lower amounts of saturated fats and cholesterol, but they also 'consumed more grains, legumes, vegetables (green leafy and yellow) and fruit' (6).

In 2015, the United Nations (UN) identified climate action and the development of sustainable consumption and production patterns as one of its Sustainable Development Goals (SGDs). These Goals serve as targets for the international community to work on and achieve by 2030 (7).

The Worldwatch Institute found that 51% of worldwide greenhouse gas emissions are the result of animal agriculture (8). The use of water and land for rearing livestock and the subsequent creation of pollutants is having a devastating impact on the world environment. It takes around 20 times as much land to feed a meat-eater than it does a

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vegan and approximately 219,000 more gallons of water per year (9). Cumulatively, livestock and their feed occupy $\frac{1}{3}$ of the earth's ice-free land and are responsible for the consumption of around $\frac{1}{3}$ of fresh water in the world today (10).

Furthermore, the distribution of animal products is skewed towards the West. For example, the 285 million tons of meat produced each year is consumed largely by Americans - the average American consumes 122kg of meat every year (11). Comparatively, the average Bangladeshi consumes around 1.8kg per year. In addition, the negative consequences of climate change affect the poorest people in developing countries the most (12).

Medsin's Stance, Strategy and Recommendations

Therefore, Medsin UK calls for;

1. All Medsin members to;
 - a. With regards to the environment,
 - i. Encourage members to partake in advocacy on the behalf of climate action
 - ii. Educate members on the main causative factors of climate change, in particular the massive effects of animal agriculture
 - b. With regards to health and diet,
 - i. Educate fellow students and the general public on nutrition and the effects of poor diet
 - ii. Advocate for and teach about the benefits of healthy eating
 - iii. Reduce individual meat intake, ideally stopping meat consumption completely
 - c. To advocate for more non-meat options at IFMSA meetings
 - d. To advocate for equity so people can make healthy food choices
2. Universities to:
 - a. Provide students with more meat-free options on campus
 - b. Inform students about the health and environmental benefits of meat-free diets
3. The IFMSA to advocate for all National Member Organisations to:
 - a. Include and encourage the discussion of animal agriculture and non-meat diets
 - b. Reduce the consumption of meat during IFMSA meetings

References

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