



A qualitative exploration of food choice motives of Pacific Islanders: Implications for the use of the Food Choice Questionnaire in understudied populations

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Nutrition transitions are key contributors to the obesity epidemic plaguing South Pacific Island countries (SPIC). Prior to European contact and colonisation, traditional Pacifica diets consisted mainly of root crops, indigenous fruits and vegetables, freshwater proteins and seafood⁽¹⁾. This diet has been replaced by diets high in processed foods which are high in salt, sugar and unhealthy fats⁽²⁾. Various political, economic, environmental and socio-cultural factors have been associated with the proliferation of unhealthy foods in Pacifica diets. However, very few studies have examined how these changes have impacted individual food choices. This study aims to address the gap in the knowledge of food choice motives of Pacific Islanders. An online qualitative survey was used⁽¹⁾ to explore how the nine food choice motives in the widely used Food Choice Questionnaire (FCQ)⁽³⁾ impact food choice and ⁽²⁾ to identify additional food choice motives, not captured in the FCQ. The first section of the survey included open-ended questions which explored the top three food choice motives of the participants. This section was followed by a series of open-ended questions exploring participant's views on the nine food choice motives from the FCQ. The last part of the survey asked participants to identify any other food choice motives which were not already identified in the survey. An exploratory qualitative approach, employing inductive and deductive thematic analyses, was used to analyse results⁽⁴⁾. The sample ($N = 105$) was predominantly female (73%), living with family (72%) and the average age was 22.06 years (S.D = 5.0). It consisted of 28% indigenous Fijians, 26% Fijians of Indian descent, 15% Solomon Islanders, 13% I-Kiribati and smaller percentages of students from Niue (3%), Samoa (5%), Tonga (5%) and Vanuatu (5%). Of the nine FCQ motives, the most commonly identified top three food choice motives included *price* ($n = 54$), *health* ($n = 45$), and *sensory appeal*, especially *taste* ($n = 40$). Participants also identified three new food choice motives which many ranked in their top three motives: *satiety concerns* ($n = 22$), *food quality and hygiene* when eating out ($n = 26$) and *religious or cultural food restrictions* ($n = 11$). Additionally, issues with face validity of the *health*, *convenience*, *price*, *weight control* and *familiarity* food choice motives from the FCQ were identified. These findings highlight the importance of validity studies prior to using FCQ, and more broadly other similar instruments, with understudied populations like that of SPIC. The findings also provided important insights into the food choice motives of Pacific Islanders and can inform public health interventions for encouraging healthy eating. Further research using an adapted FCQ with larger and diverse samples will increase its effectiveness of measuring food choice motives in the region.

Keywords: food choice; nutrition transition; obesity; Pacific Island Countries

Ethics Declaration

No

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