Food Choice Trajectories, Transitions, and Indigenous Knowledge

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Editorial

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Ecology of Food and Nutrition (EFN) promotes scholarly discussion and engagement on the holistic and cross-cultural dimensions of the study of food and nutrition. Articles published in this journal focus on foods and food systems not only in terms of their utilization to satisfy human nutritional needs and health, but also how social and cultural factors relate to food, food cultures, and nutrition. Only a handful of journals publish articles that explicitly address the intersections of food and nutrition, biology and culture, and policy and practice from a holistic and global perspective. It is this kind of scholarship that EFN seeks to promote. This issue of EFN includes seven articles based on scholarly research conducted in Latin America, the Dominican Republic, North America, Africa, and Asia. The articles focus on a range of topics including childhood and adolescent undernutrition and obesity, food transition and sovereignty, and indigenous knowledge.

Pamela Weisberg-Shapiro and Carol Devine use the life course perspective to examine the extent to which adult food choice trajectories are influenced by childhood experiences with food among Dominican born women living in low-income neighborhoods in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic and in Latino-majority neighborhoods in New York City. The authors report that Dominican Republic women participating in the study developed and maintained their food choices based on childhood experience with food. Nevertheless, changes in the social environment and increased purchasing power among sample women living in New York City resulted in the consumption of large quantities of food. These findings suggest that women’s food choice trajectories reflect not only their childhood experience with food, but also their individual social and economic environments.

The article by Amy Henderson and Joyce Slater presents the results of a qualitative action research project that engaged the target community into developing, implementing, and evaluating the “Growing Roots” program to reduce food insecurity and improve dietary acculturation among newcomer families living in an inner city neighborhood in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. The results of the study suggest that newcomers to Canada prefer food sovereignty, which aligns well with the growing food sovereignty movement of Canada’s indigenous people. The authors conclude that by actively engaging target communities into developing appropriate food security programs, one can ensure healthy food transition and acculturation, and improve health.

The article by Jeyakumar and colleagues focuses on the prevalence of undernutrition among children living in urban slums in India. The authors used a cross-sectional study design to collect anthropometric and sociodemographic data to identify the prevalence of undernutrition and predisposing factors among children in 28 slum communities in Pune, India. Based on the results of their study the authors conclude that improving maternal knowledge about the importance of feeding practices for infants and children and promoting child immunization can reduce children’s vulnerability to undernutrition.
Gezmen-Karadag and colleagues report the results of an innovative observational study evaluating the level of awareness among school teachers about a national-level nutrition program sponsored by Turkey’s Ministry of Education to prevent obesity among children. Based on the results of this study the authors report that school teachers in Turkey do not have sufficient knowledge about policies and programs related to improving nutrition among school children. The authors also report that school teachers in the eastern region of the country show the lowest level of awareness of the country’s Nutrition-Friendly School Program and the White-Flag Protocol. The authors conclude by reinforcing the importance of increasing awareness about obesity and school based nutrition education programs among school teachers.

The article by Tariku et al. focuses on undernutrition among adolescents in Ethiopia. The authors report the results of a cross-sectional study conducted among 1550 adolescent girls in the Dabat district in northwestern Ethiopia to assess the prevalence of stunting and its determinants. The results suggest that adolescent girls living in rural regions of the country are 1.45 times more likely to be stunted than their urban counterparts. The authors argue that stunting among adolescent girls in rural Ethiopia is a serious public health problem and can be addressed through sustainable household-based interventions to improve food security.

The article by Ahmed et al. examines the effect of high fast food consumption on body weight and obesity among medical students from Gulf Cooperation countries (the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates). The researchers collected anthropometric and sociodemographic data on 251 medical students studying in Bahrain. The authors report that nearly half of the students who participated in the study consumed fast food and approximately 36% were overweight or obese. Majority of the students consumed fast food because of a lack of time to cook healthy food or easy accessibility to fast food. The authors suggest improving the availability and access to healthier food options to reduce obesity among medical students.

Finally, the article Dias-Jose et al. presents the results of a survey-based study documenting the consumption and management of edible wild plants (quelites) in the Zongolica region of Mexico. The authors identify fifteen species of quelites that are consumed by people living in the region with varying frequency of consumption depending on people’s preference for taste and the availability of the plants. The authors discuss the findings of their study in the context of traditional indigenous knowledge of plant-based food, management of quelites, and the environmental changes that threaten the local ecosystem and biodiversity. Finally, the authors strongly recommend implementing programs and policies that ensure food security, preservation of local biodiversity and indigenous knowledge, and sustainable agricultural practices.

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