

Dietary patterns and nutrition priorities of African refugee communities



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Working with the people of Auckland, Counties Manukau and Waitemata

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Setting the scene

- The refugee population is one of the most disadvantaged groups in NZ society
Many members have:
 - settlement issues
 - high rates of poverty
 - unemployment
 - little or no formal education
 - difficulties with English language
- Dietary acculturation leads to an increased risk of obesity, diabetes and CVD

Aim

To identify dietary patterns and nutrition needs of five sub-Saharan African refugee groups

- Congolese
- Sudanese
- Somali
- Eritrean
- Ethiopian

Methods

1) Nutrition needs of refugees

Literature review

2) Key food issues

Discussion groups

3) Dietary patterns

Focus groups

1) Literature review findings

- Foods of adopted country are widely accepted
i.e. breakfast cereals, takeaway foods, bakery foods, sandwiches, new fruits and vegetables
- Low priced snack and takeaway foods are popular
- Many foods are substituted
i.e. camel meat, sorghum, teff, cassava flour, fresh fish
- Butter, oil, sugar & salt may be added to achieve taste

2) Discussion group findings

- Priority nutrition issues
 - i. children's diets and school lunches
 - ii. intake of takeaways foods (children and youth)
 - iii. gaps in community's knowledge of healthy food
 - iv. change in food patterns since coming to NZ
 - v. safety of NZ foods

3) Focus group findings

- Food perception
 - ‘healthy food is food cooked at home’
 - ‘NZ foods are less fresh and more processed’
 - ‘food in NZ tastes different’
- Food purchasing
 - food is usually purchased by women
 - Asian grocers, Indian specialty stores, supermarkets, Hallal butchers, local markets

3) Focus group findings

- Dietary patterns
 - many similarities between ethnic groups
 - diets with large proportions of meat and bread-based foods
 - low intakes of fibre
 - high consumption of tea (especially women)
 - regular fasting

3) Focus group findings

- Dietary patterns
 - traditional dishes cooked at home
 - dishes commonly containing meat, onions, tomato, spices, chilli, okra, garlic → highly flavoured
 - families commonly eat together at the table
 - children are sent to school with ‘Western foods’ and lunchboxes lack variety
 - takeaways and soft drinks are popular with youth

3) Focus group findings

- Dietary patterns
 - Fruits and vegetables
 - usually purchased fresh
 - concerns with chemicals and fertilizers
 - regular consumption of fruit juice
 - Meat and alternatives
 - large red meat eaters
 - red kidney beans and lentils added to dishes

3) Focus group findings

– Bread and cereal foods

- Weet-bix, ricies and cornflakes eaten by children
- porridge, semolina, pasta, white rice
- sandwiches/toast with white bread
- traditional breads
 - i.e. injeera, kisra, asida, roti



– Dairy products

- blue top milk mostly consumed
- milo with sugar and milk given to children

3) Focus group findings

- Food preparation
 - meals usually prepared by women
 - regular use of oil and butter in cooking
- Changes in diet
 - increased intake of processed/packaged foods
 - fresh and organic meat, milk, vegetables and fruit eaten back home
 - no issue of needing to ‘eat healthy food’



Conclusions

- Sub-saharan African refugees experience many dietary changes following arrival to NZ
- families place value in cooking and eating together and traditional dishes often contain:
 - meat
 - few vegetables
 - plenty of oil
 - traditional breads
- interventions need to address concerns around the processing of NZ food