Insights into the dietary behavior of asylum-seekers in Stuttgart

PD, Dr. Veronika Scherbaum
Institute of Nutrition Science, University of Hohenheim

International Conference „The Refugee consumer...“, University Siegen, December 6th, 2019
Insights into the dietary behavior of asylum-seekers in Stuttgart

Overview:

- Introduction: culture-nutrition-migration

- Results of studies among asylum seekers in communal accommodations in Stuttgart
  - Quantitative study, 2016
  - Qualitative study, 2017
Studies in 4 communal accommodations for asylum-seekers supervised by Caritas, Stuttgart

**Explorative cross-sectional study**

n=96, 64♀, 32♂, ØAge: 31,8 ys., Time since immigration: 1 week - 18 months

**Home countries of study group:**

Syria n=47, Iraq n=12, Afghanistan n=11, Iran n=9, Nigeria n=5, Pakistan n=5, Somalia n=2, Eritrea n=2, Gambia n=2, Albania n=1

**Methods:**

- Interviews about nutrition pattern: in home country, during migration, in Germany
- Anthropometric assessments (height, weight)
- 24-hour dietary recall

- **Quantitative study, 2016**
- **Qualitative study, 2017**

Khan S, Fischer F, Ghazani S, Jeremias T, Scherbaum V, 2019
Studies in 4 communal accommodations for asylum-seekers supervised by Caritas, Stuttgart

- Quantitative study, 2016
- Qualitative study, 2017

• Study group:
  25 females incl. pregnant and lactating women from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan

• Methods:
  5 focus group discussions, 4 participatory observations in food shops
Studies in 4 communal accommodations for asylum-seekers supervised by Caritas, Stuttgart

Assistance by mother tongue translators:
- Quantitative study, 2016
- Qualitative study, 2017
Dietary behavior

Influencing factors

- political
- economical
- biological
- psychological
- structural
- social
- religious
- cultural

Modified: Bio-psycho-sozio-cultural model (AGEV 1978) and Oltersdorf U, 1984
Influences on dietary behavior of asylum seekers
- from the perspective of different time periods

Home country    Migration period    Host country

Devine CM, 2005; Edmonston B, 2013
Influences on dietary behavior of asylum seekers

Examples of influence levels

Home country

Migration period

Host country

Social network

Family

Media

Refugee assistance

Health services

Food products
Traditional dietary concepts

- Distinction between preferred and prohibited foods
- Migration and dietary concepts
- Culture specific food regulations

Examples of influence levels

Host country

Traditional dietary concepts

- Home country
- Social net
- Family

Examples of influence levels

Distinction between

- preferred
- less preferred
- avoided
- prohibited foods
Traditional dietary concepts
- Culture specific food regulations

Distinction between

preferred
↓
less preferred

avoided
↓
prohibited foods

Food taboos
- concerning most frequently
  Animal products, particularly meat
  Prohibitions during pregnancy

Home country

Traditional dietary concepts
- Culture specific food regulations

Specific qualities are attributed to certain foods

Distinction between

preferred  ⇩
less preferred  ⇩
avoided  ⇩
prohibited foods

Fulfilment of religious rules

Home country
Traditional dietary concepts
- Culture specific food regulations

Specific qualities are attributed to certain foods

Distinction between

- preferred
- less preferred
- avoided
- prohibited foods

Fulfilment of religious rules

- **PURE**
- **HALAL**
- **IMPURE**
- **HARAM**

Establishment of balance/equilibrium

- **yin** - hot - wet
- **yang** - cold - dry

Meyer-Rochow VB, 2009;
Fessler DMT and Navarrete CD, 2003;
Traditional dietary concepts
- Culture specific food regulations

Specific qualities are attributed to certain foods

**Distinction between**
- preferred
- less preferred
- avoided
- prohibited foods

- Fulfilment of religious rules
  - PURE
  - IMPURE
  - HALAL
  - HARAM

- Establishment of balance/equilibrium

**Example:**
- Pregnancy
  - „hot“
- Lactation
  - „cold“

Meyer-Rochow VB, 2009;
Fessler DMT and Navarrete CD, 2003;
Traditional dietary concepts
- Culture specific food regulations

Distinction between

- preferred
- less preferred
- avoided
- prohibited

Specific qualities are attributed to certain foods

- Fulfilment of religious rules
  - PURE
  - IMPURE
  - HALAL
  - HARAM

- Establishment of balance/equilibrium

Example:
- Pregnancy → „hot“
- Lactation → „cold“

Foods and drinks of complementary quality

Meyer-Rochow VB, 2009;
Fessler DMT and Navarrete CD, 2003;
Traditional diet in home countries of asylum-seekers

Home country

Composition of meals

Traditional diet in Near/Middle Eastern and African regions
➢ To a great extent beneficial for health

Sofi E et al. 2014
Nutrition Transition in home countries of asylum-seekers

Increasing consumption of „unhealthy food commodities“

- Refined and highly processed foods with ↑ energy density
- Sweetened beverages

1 Moodie R et al. 2013
Nutrition Transition in home countries of asylum-seekers

Home country

Western dietary pattern combined with physical inactivity

Increase of Obesity, diabetes mellitus II, hypertension...

Popkin BM, 2015; Popkin BM et al 2012
Dietary behavior

Migration period

Duration of migration/flight
Ø 4.4 months, 4 days - 60 months

Foods most frequently consumed on paths of refugees’ flight
✓ Water, bread and biscuits
✓ Fish in tins
✓ (Dried) fruits
✓ Canned foods
✓ Milk or meat products
Dietary behavior

- Life in emergency shelters, unfamiliar socio-cultural context
- Language communication problems
- Requirements for asylum
- Uncertain life situation, stress
- Frequent posttraumatic stress disorders

» When we arrived and we did not understand the language, eating was the last thing which came into our mind »

Woman from Syria
After relocation into smaller communal accommodations – with access to a kitchen

70-80% of respondents expressed:
Nutrition-related problems
Nutrition-related problems in the early phase of immigration

- Lack of information on access to food products

*Insufficient knowledge about*
  - locally available foods, its preparation
  - nutrition patterns of the population in the host country

» ...We were afraid to buy new foods (e.g. Kohlrabi)...

*We don´t know, whether it has to be eaten raw or cooked.* »

Women from Syria
Nutrition-related problems in the early phase of immigration

- Lack of information on access to food products
- Difficulties in buying food stuff

» I am only buying known products, since I am afraid of asking someone. »

Woman from Afghanistan
Nutrition-related problems in the early phase of immigration

- Lack of information on access to food products
- Difficulties in buying food stuff

Due to limited facilities for food storage and refrigeration:
  Buying food in bulk was not possible
Nutrition-related problems in the early phase of immigration

- Lack of information on access to food products
- Difficulties in buying food stuff

Difficulties in finding foods consumed in home countries

*Availability only in special Afro/Asian shops*

Particular need among Muslims:

*Halal products*
Nutrition-related problems in the early phase of immigration

- Lack of information on access to food products
- Difficulties in buying food stuff
- Acceptance problems regarding certain foods

Diminished acceptance in terms of taste e.g. of frozen fish, vegetables, fruits

»...here, the taste (of tomatoes, cucumbers, melons...) is different.
...In Syria, vegetables taste if they come out of the soil »

Women from Syria
Nutrition in the early phase of immigration

Consumption of foods and drinks as compared to home country

- **Lower consumption**
  - Fish
  - Red meat

- **Higher consumption**
  - Fruits
  - Sweetened beverages
Consumption of foods

Analysis of 24 hour dietary recalls (n=55)

- Intake of Macronutrients:
  Carbohydrates 45%, Proteins 10-15%,
  Fats 40% (of total energy intake)

- Alimentary deficits of micronutrients:
  Iron, Iodine, Folic acid ...

- Low variability of foods
Anthropometric assessment

- **Overweight and obesity** (BMI ≥ 25)
  - among ca. 2/3 of women

  *Among nearly half of women:*
  - Overweight has existed already before conception

- **Additional risk factor:**
  Lack of physical / sportive activities among >2/3 of women

*Role of culture-specific gender norms, status symbols and beauty ideals?*
Adaptations of dietary pattern in 2\textsuperscript{nd} year - Qualitative study, 2017

- Adaptions regarding choice and purchase of food products
- $\uparrow$ Acceptance of previously unknown food
- Development of culturally adapted modes of preparation e.g. of frozen fish
Adaptations of dietary pattern in 2nd year
- Alterations of eating culture

Home country

Lack of traditional patterns of
- Eating together
- Customs of taking meals
- Rituals, communication
  ➢ Feeling of cultural identity

Host country
Adaptations of dietary pattern in 2\textsuperscript{nd} year
- Alterations of eating culture

Lack of traditional patterns of
- Eating together
- Customs of taking meals
- Rituals, communication
  \hspace{1cm} \textgreater \hspace{1cm} Feeling of cultural identity

Consumption of
- Ready made meals
- Sandwiches, snacks outside the home
  \hspace{1cm} \textgreater \hspace{1cm} Eating alone:
  \hspace{1cm} \textgreater \hspace{1cm} Feeling of isolation

Adapt daily routines, Absence of family net works
I am happy that I can buy our familiar foodstuff now and I can prepare the same meals like in Syria.

Maintenance of traditional dietary pattern

- Food groups: staple food
  Rice, traditional bread...

- During weekends: traditional meal...

See also Koctürk-Runefors T, 1991
Among female asylum seekers:

- Breastfeeding was the norm
- Tendency for a long duration of breastfeeding

Recreating dietary pattern of home countries - Example: infant and young child nutrition

Maintenance of traditional dietary pattern
Recreating dietary pattern of home countries
- *Example: infant and young child nutrition*

**Maintenance of traditional dietary pattern**

- **Before onset of breastfeeding**
  - offering of prelacteal foods and denial of colostrum

- **Early feeding of**
  - breast milk substitutes and/or complementary food

» *Shortly after delivery the language course started. Thus my husband has fed the child with milk powder »*
Woman from Afghanistan

» *We love it, when our babies look chubby and we perceive it as a sign of health »*
Woman from Syria
Dietary behavior of asylum seekers - Between tradition and acculturation

Maintenance of traditional dietary pattern vs attempts to adapt to food habits of host country

Influencing factors
- political
- economical
- biological
- psychological
- structural
- social
- religious
- cultural

Beliefs, concepts of well being, body ideals, food preferences and tabus, gender norms

Satia-Abouta J, 2003
Dietary behavior of asylum seekers - Between tradition and acculturation

Maintenance of traditional dietary pattern

Need of programs in the area of ‘Public Health Nutrition’

Satia-Abouta J, 2003
Examples of nutrition-related programs and initiatives aiming to assist asylum-seekers

- **Essential:** language assistance by translators

- **Assessment of nutritional status/behavior,** culture-sensitive counselling  
  
  *during*  
  - initial medical check-up  
  - period of pregnancy, lactation and complementary feeding

- **Nutrition-relevant assistance**  
  e.g by experts, peers, cultural mediators

- **Participation at nutrition-related events**  
  ⇒ Intercultural exchange of reciplies and cooking experiences  
  Reinforcement of confidence in own dietary competences
References


Meyer-Rochow VB. **Food taboos: their origins and purposes.** J Ethnobiol Ethnomed. 2009 Jun 29;5:18.


