

Balancing Daily Food Consumption Practices among Rural Households in Umuahia Environment in Abia State Nigeria

¹Patricia E. Mbah &
²Ozioma C. Azubuikwe
^{1&2}Department of Home
Economics / Hospitality Management
& Tourism, Michael Okpara University
of Agriculture, Umudike, Umuahia,
Abia State Nigeria.

Abstract

Daily consumption practices of healthy foods and life styles reduce the risk and the burden of communicable and non-communicable diseases. The practice of consuming adequate quantities of safe and good quality foods make healthy meals and promotes good life. This paper examined balancing daily food consumption practices among rural households in Umuahia Environment. The objectives of the paper was to examine, the daily food consumption practices of rural households, factors that influences the food consumption practices among rural household and socio-economic status of those households. The population of the study comprises all the five clans in Umuahia environment. Six households from each rural setting in each clan, making a total of thirty households were selected as the sample for the study using stratified and multistage sampling techniques. The instrument for data collection was a structured interview based on focus group discussion and food frequency records. The data collected was coded using adapted food frequency table and diet records. Analysis of statistics was done using mean, standard deviation and t-test to answer the hypothesis on purpose of study 2 and 3, at significant of 0.05 alpha level. While mean and standard deviation were used to answer research question 1. The findings revealed that there was no significant difference in the food consumption practices among the rural households. It was also revealed that socio-economic status of the households influenced their food consumption practices. The study therefore recommended that these households be enlightened on adequate food balancing procedure via nutrition education advocacy. There should also be a way of encouraging basic household agricultural production and consumption of foods produced within the family (household). Thus, encouraging sustainable development in food consumption amongst the rural households in Umuahia environment.

Keywords: *Food balancing, Consumption, Practices and households.*

Coressponding Author: Patricia E. Mbah

Background to the Study

The patterns of household lifestyle have shown to have effect/influence on the food consumption of the household. The choice of lifestyle determines what is produced, bought and consumed directly or indirectly by the households. The household's daily food consumption is associated with the health of the family members especially in rural households where food consumption practices seem to be similar among households. It is important to note that the practice of daily food consumption in rural areas is not done in sustainable manner and this tends to jeopardize the health states of the family member. (AbaRazack, Muhammed Ludin & Umeru, 2013).

Food consumption practices should be balanced to make it sustainable and reduce the incidence of malnutrition in younger children, reduce the risk of communicable and non-communicable diseases amongst family members. Food is any edible substance that is eaten or taken into the body to maintain life and for proper functioning of the body. Food is necessary for energy, growth, good health and body development. Adequate consumption of food that contains all the nutrients in the right proportion is very relevant. (Borja, Kuijer & Aprile, 2010). Similarly, whether food is appreciated or not, it has value because of its significance to sustaining life, therefore it must be available for consumption. In many Nigerian communities a lot of foods are grown and produced most of these foods run shortage in rural areas where they are majorly cultivated. The availability of foods are also affected by seasonal weather or climate change, storage system, pests infestation of households resulting in most of the foods are not always available or not within reach for the households consumption (Spengemernn, 2011).

Food consumption practices is a personal behaviour or attitude which one or individuals form over time towards food. These practices could be an organized or specified format of eating in the family or among households. In such practices, most often the nutritional values of what the households consume are ignored. In most rural areas in Nigeria the food consumption practices of the households are greatly influenced by eating habits and what is readily available for consumption and not necessarily what is right or nutritionally adequate to be consumed. These habits are cultural; the majority of people eat two meals a day, usually lunch and dinner. Most often breakfast is skipped, in-between meals/snacks are commonly eaten examples are biscuits, groundnuts, popcorn, roasted yam/plantain or potatoes, bean cakes (akara) (Jong & Maze, 2013).

Consequently, the socio-economic status of the rural households also has an influence over the daily food consumption practices of the household. Those within the high socio-economic status (SES) may tend to feed better than the household at low socio-economic status (SES) because the high socio-economic households may have enough resources (income) to buy most of the food items than the other counterparts (Spengemann, 2011). However, whichever SES level, the foods may not have adequate nutrients and this could make members of the households not to have access to their nutritional requirement. This is because the households eat for taste and not for quality (Anne lise, Kulyer & Rydell, 2013). The choices of food in rural households are economically, culturally driven and set within social context (De Borja, 2010). The importance of nutrition is paramount to avoiding malnutrition and under nutrition in children particularly and among members of the households working towards the achievement of reducing child mortality, improving maternal health and ensuring longevity / good quality of life among family members. This idea of achieving optimum nutrition

adequacy could be achieved with balancing the daily food consumption practices amongst rural household. Balancing daily food consumption practices considers consumption of variety/types of foods and drinks from all food groups regularly for nourishing the body. This practice will enable family members to enjoy good nutrition, live healthy, reduce malnutrition and the risk of communicable and non-communicable diseases. It was based on these considerations that this study was conceived.

Statement of the Problem

Rural households are often faced with problems of unavailability of foods, poverty, food insecurity, and poor food choices which makes the balancing of household meals a tedious task. Households with health issues or challenges would naturally have problems with meeting nutritional needs of family members concerned thus raising an added challenge with balancing their nutritional requirement. The implication is that households having individuals and people with specific diet needs are not able to balance daily food consumption practices in their respective families because they may lack inspiration and or knowledge about, how and or what to eat. More so, poor food choices and high prices of foods especially at this economic recession influence the quality and quantity of food consumed by rural households. There has been prevalence of malnutrition among children, high level of diseases and infections because rural households are not selecting the right food commodities as choices especially the household of low socio economic status and internally displaced people as reported on the media and most significant since the economic recession became apparent in Nigeria in 2016.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the study is to ascertain the possibility of balancing daily food consumption practices among rural households in Umuahia Environment in Abia State Nigeria. Also the study specifically:

1. Examined the daily food consumption practices among rural households.
2. Determined the factors that influences balancing food consumption practices of the rural households
3. Ascertained the socio-economic status of the rural household in balancing daily food consumption practices.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study

1. What are the daily food consumption practices of rural households in Umuahia?
2. What factors influences balancing daily food consumption practices amongst rural women?
3. What is the influence of socio-economic status on balancing daily food consumption practices among rural household?

Hypothesis

One hypothesis was raised to guide the study

H_{o_1} – There is no significant difference in the high socio-economic and low socio-economic status of rural households on balancing the consumption practices.

Significance of the Study

The results from this study will be useful in establishing food consumption practices of rural households and the possibilities of assisting to conduct public nutrition enlightenment

programme. The outcome from this study could guide nutrition scholars through seminars, workshops, conferences and results could also be published in journals and magazines which will be beneficial to home makers, nutritionists, children in schools and Home Economics extension workers. This study will enable home makers in rural and urban households to know the right food selection and the proper way of feeding the family by giving the family balanced meals at all times.

Methodology

Design of Study

The study was a descriptive survey design.

Area of study – Thy study was carried out in Umuahia environment in Abia State in the South East geopolitical zone in Nigeria. Umuahia is divided into of five clans. The five clans are Ibeku, Olokoro, Ikwuano, Umuokpara and Ohuhu. Within this clans are remote rural settings from which the samples for this study were drawn.

Population of the Study

The population of the study comprised of the all the households in the five clans of Umuahia environment. The specific number of all the households in these clans is not known because they are not registered in the local government register.

Sampling and Sampling Techniques

The sample for the study was six households randomly selected from the five clans in the rural settings making it a total of 30 households, the techniques employed were stratified and multistage sampling techniques. The five clans represents the strata and each stratum was separated in stages following the availability of social amenities to determine those that fell within the rural setting from where households under the study were drawn randomly.

Instrumentation

The instrument for data collection was a structured interview developed by the investigators on balancing food consumption food practices of the rural households (BFCPORH) for the purpose of this study and based on the research questions raised. The interview items consist of questions based on food frequency questions (FFQ) which was based on the consumption of the five food groups of Daily – (D) = 4, once in week (OIW) = 3, occasionally (OC) = 2 and Not at all (NAA) = 1. The purpose two on the factors that influence food consumption practices of household was also constructed on a 4 – point scale. The index for assessment were Strongly Agree\ SA = 4, Agree A = 3, Strongly Disagree SD = 2, Disagree = 1. The socio-economic status of the households were based on the socio-economic status index developed by Vyas&Kumeranyakn, (2600). This index was used to place the households on various socio-economic status such as high SES (H-SES) and low SES (L-SES).

Educational status: Ph. D = 6, M.A/M.Ed/M.Sc.= 5, OND/HND = 4, NCE/TC11 = 3, SSCE = 2, Primary school = 1, none = 0.

Household Occupation: higher executives, proprietors of large business and major professionals = 9, administrators, lesser professionals, technicians, proprietors of medium-sized business = 8, farm owners, managers and minor professionals lesser professionals = 7, technicians, semi-professional and small business owners = 6, clerical and sales workers, small farm and business owners = 5, smaller business owners, skilled workers = 3, unskilled workers

= 2, farm labourer/miniservice workers = 1, none = 0 household Income (per month): 100,000 and above = 2, below 100,000 = 1.

Each household composite score will be computed by multiplying the occupation scale value by a weight of 5 and the education scale value by 3 and summing the products, and then add the result to the scores gotten from the parent's income. The index raw scores range from 1 to 68, the higher scores reflecting higher socio-economic status and below 35 scores is categorized as low socio-economic status; 35 scores and above is categorized as high socio-economic status.

Method of data analysis

The data was analyzed using mean as standard deviation for research question 1 & 2 and t-test was used to analyze H_0 at 0.05 level of significance. Acceptance level was set at 2.5.

Result

Research question 1

What is the consumption practice of rural households?

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation values of responses on the consumption practices of rural households.

S/N	Items of Household	N	Mean	SD	Remark
1.	Consumption of grains/tubers	30	2.1	0.08	Rejected
2.	Vegetable consumption	30	3.2	0.02	Accepted
3.	Fruit consumption	30	3.3	0.04	Accepted
4.	Meat & Legumes	30	1.73	0.005	Rejected
5.	Milk	30	1.83	0.04	Rejected

The table above indicated that the rural households consumed fruits and vegetable because these items had a mean of 3.3 and 3.2 respectively. Unfortunately these households do not consume enough meat/legumes, milk and grains/tubers as shown on the table with mean of 1.73, 1.83 and grains 2.1 respectively giving rejection decision.

Research Question 2:

What are the factors that are influencing the food consumption practices of rural households?

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation values of the responses on the factors influencing food consumption practices.

S/N	Items	N	Mean	SD	Remark
1.	Most of the foods to be consumed are not within reach of the households	30	3.3	0.04	Accepted
2.	The food items are usually too expensive for them to buy	30	3.33	3.33	Accepted
3.	Some of the households are not knowledgeable/aware of how to balance the meals they consume	30	2.6	0.07	Accepted
4.	The household may not have access to the market where to buy some the items they need.	30	2.78	0.09	Accepted
5.	Most of the household prefer to sell they products produced from farm rather than consuming those products	30	2.7	0.011	Accepted

Table 2 showed that all the items had mean of 3.33, 3.2, 2.8, 2.7 respectively which was above the set decision rule of 2.5. The items were therefore accepted as the factors that influenced balancing the household consumption practices.

Test of Hypothesis

H₀: There is no significant difference in High SES and low SES of the rural households in Umuahia environment.

Items	Mean	SD	T.Cal	D/F	P.value	Decision
High SES	30	7.3	2.8	29	2.06	Not significant.
Low SES	30	4.44	2.8			

Table 3 shows the summary t-test of the significant difference of high SES and low SES. The calculated t-value however showed should the items were significant ($P < .05$) and table t-value of 2.06 showed that there is a difference in the consumption practices of high SES and low SES. The decision rule is based on the fact that 2,06 is less that 2.5 level of significant.

Discussion of Findings

The discussion of the findings were based on the analysis made on the balancing the food consumption practices of the rural households. This results revealed that the households do not consume adequate nutritional diets based on the four groups as shown on table 1 where most items that would indicate better food consumption practices had a mean below 2,5 which was rejected. Similarly, table 2 of the factors that influences consumption practices had mean values of 3.33, 3.3, 2.8 etc. respectively which indicated that these were the factors that influenced the household food consumption practices. There was also a significant difference in the consumption practices of high SES compared with low SES indicating that the former feed better than the later. This may be due to the fact that the high SES have better resources that could have supported their food consumption practices. This was in line with (spengemann, 2011) who stressed on the high SES household having more resources (income) to get what the family needs.

Conclusion

Based on the finding of the study it was discovered that rural household do not balance their food consumption practices due to lack of awareness and socio-economic status of the households.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were proffered aimed at improving and balancing the food consumption practices of the rural households.

1. Households should be enlightened on adequate food balancing procedure via nutrition education advocacy.
2. There should also be a way of encouraging basic household agricultural production and consumption of foods produced within the family (household). Thus, encouraging sustainable development in food consumption amongst the rural households in Umuahia environment
3. Home Economics Extension workers should visit rural settings in various communities and teach the importance and need of eating right.
4. The farmers amongst the rural households should be advised not to preserve most of the commodities they produce from their farm for their consumption to promote good health.

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