Exploring the Dietary Behaviors and Perceptions of African Immigrants: A Qualitative Study of Nigerian and Congolese Immigrants

Oluwatosin Akingbule1,6, Margarita Teran-Garcia2,3,4,6, Olive Panumpabi5,6, Reginald Alston1,6

1Department of Kinesiology and Community Health, 2Division of Nutritional Sciences, 3University of Illinois Extension, 4Department of Biomedical and Translational Sciences, Carle Illinois College of Medicine, 5Department of Psychology, 6University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Champaign, IL

Summary

African immigrants in the U.S. develop worse cardiometabolic risk profiles as they stay longer in the U.S. This change has been attributed to dietary acculturation. This study explores contextual factors associated with changes in dietary behaviors of recent immigrant families using focus groups interviews. Participants were recent Nigerian and Congolese immigrant adults. They discussed diet, meal preparation, and physical activity practices for their families. Thematic analysis of focus groups data showed that participants preferred and mostly consumed African traditional meals. The findings will assist in development of prevention obesity and related diseases among African Immigrants.

Objective

To explore contextual factors associated with changes in dietary behaviors of recent immigrant families from Nigeria and Congo.

Methods

- 5 online focus groups (3 in English and 2 with French Interpreter)
- Conducted September 2020- January 2021
- Participants (N=20; 95% female, mean age=41 years) were Nigerian and Congolese immigrants (see Fig. 1)
- Recruitment was done from churches and through community leaders in Central and West Central Illinois
- Interview questions were partly adapted from previous study, reviewed by community stakeholders, and focused on dietary practices in the family
- Thematic analysis was conducted using NVivo version 12

Results

Country of origin

- Nigeria: 60%
- Congo: 40%

Educational status

- Bachelor’s: 4
- College/Associate: 6
- High School: 2
- < High School: 8

Key themes

- Preference for African foods
- Perception of “American food” as unhealthy
- Kids’ preference for western diet
- Preference for organic food products

Example quotes

“And with my husband... sometimes, when we talk, we say to each other, we have to keep our food,...we have to keep our diet.”

“Food here is too sugary and too salty. If you haven’t bought something that’s too sweet, be sure it will be too salty.”

“Sometimes we mix. The children are used to the food over here. They have even begun to sabotage the food of our home. So, to not leave them hungry, we are obliged to mix.”

“I get organic fruits. Even though it costs more, it’s good... it has some taste, and I can trust it more.”

Conclusion

Key findings:
- African immigrants have a high level of awareness of the impact of diet practices on their health.
- The unique meal preferences of African immigrants suggest that nutrition education information and programming targeting African immigrants need to be culturally tailored.
- Kids’ preference for western diet could be a source of dietary acculturation for the family.

The findings will assist in the cultural tailoring of nutrition education intervention aimed at preventing obesity and related diseases among African Immigrants.

References


Acknowledgements

The “Abriendo Caminos” Research Team at University of Illinois Urbana Champaign. This study was partially supported by the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture, Hatch Project 816-793-374 (to M. Teran-Garcia). Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the view of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

For more information, please contact
Oluwatosin Akingbule at oao3@illinois.edu