

Perception of dietary change and attitudes towards the Irish diet among non-nationals in Ireland



Qianling Zhou
Phensiri Asawasirisap
John Kearney

School of Biological Sciences,
Dublin Institute of Technology,
Kevin Street, Dublin 8, Republic of Ireland
Email: qianling.zhou@dit.ie
Tel: +353 (01) 402 4914

Background

There are cross-cultural differences in dietary attitudes

- The Pan-EU Survey: marked cross-national differences in the salience of health as an influence on eating patterns in the 15 member states of the European Union^[1]
- The Dutch-American Study: the Dutch adults were much less fat conscious than those in the United States^[2]

Immigrants may experience dietary changes, and the local environment is one of the factors related to the changes

- Pakistani women migrated to Norway: changes in meal pattern, meal composition and intake of different foods^[3]
- Chinese immigrants in the United States: changes in eating patterns^[4]

Hypothesis: Immigrants in Ireland experience dietary changes

Aim: Acquire an insight into the dietary changes and the perception of the Irish diet among the non-nationals living in Ireland, in an attempt to have a better understanding of the Irish diet.

Methods

A self-administered cross-sectional survey was distributed to a randomly selected sample of English language students in Dublin.

Data analysis (SPSS15): Pearson Chi-square

10 schools were randomly selected from 60 recognized English language schools

604 students attending intermediate/upper level classes were invited

507 students responded (Response rate 84%)

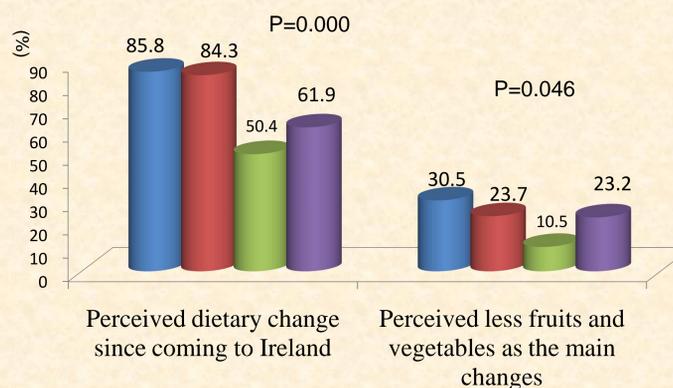
Subject population: 473
 (34 respondents were excluded)

Results

Sample characteristic (n=473)

Sample characteristic	n	%
Gender		
Male	203	43.0
Female	269	57.0
Age (years)		
18-26	387	60.9
>26	184	39.1
Education		
Primary/Secondary	93	19.8
Tertiary	377	80.2
Marital Status		
Single	389	82.8
Married	81	17.2
Region		
Asia	144	31.3
Europe	141	30.7
Africa	52	11.3
South & Central America	123	26.7
Duration in Ireland		
< 1 year	255	53.9
≥ 1 year	218	46.1

Question 1: Has your diet changed since living in Ireland? If yes, what were the main changes?

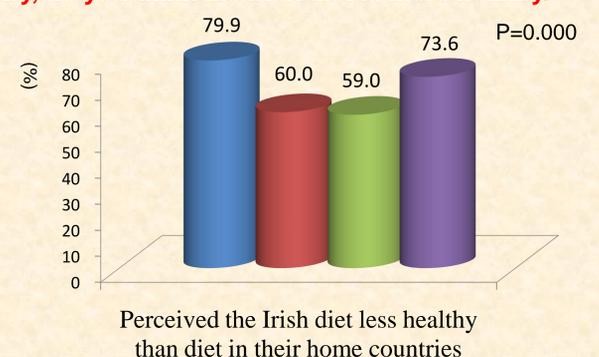


66.8% of the participants perceived dietary change after coming to Ireland. Higher percentages of South & Central Americans and Africans indicated dietary change than that of Asians.

Less fruit and vegetable consumption was indicated as one of the main changes (22.7%). South & Central Americans were more likely than Europeans and Africans, and much more likely than Asians to indicate this change.

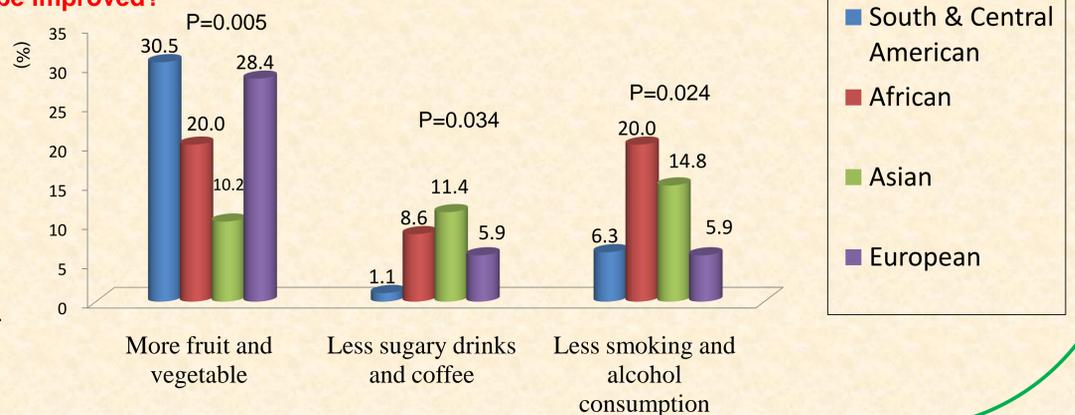
Question 2: Compared to the diet in your home country, do you think the Irish diet is more healthy/ less healthy / equally healthy?

69.3% of the participants considered the Irish diet less healthy than the diet in their home countries. About 80% of South & Central Americans and 74% of Europeans deemed the Irish diet to be less healthy; whereas Asians were more likely to have an optimistic attitude or no idea, and less likely to have a pessimistic attitude toward the Irish diet. The highest ratio stating 'no difference' (26%) was contributed by Africans.



Question 3: How do you think the Irish diet should be improved?

South & Central Americans were the most likely subgroup to suggest 'more fruit and vegetable', followed by Europeans and Africans. Asians were the least likely subgroup to pay attention to the intake of fruit and vegetables. Conversely, Asians were much more likely to suggest a reduction in sugary drinks/coffee than South & Central Americans who had the least likelihood to report 'more sweet foods' as their main dietary change. The advice of 'less alcohol and cigarettes' was raised by higher proportions of Africans and Asians than those of South & Central Americans and Europeans.



Conclusions

- Diet was perceived to become less healthy after coming to Ireland. This confirmed the finding of previous studies that people from non-Western countries suffered from worse dietary change after migrating to the Western country^[3, 4].
- There were cross-cultural differences in the perception of dietary change and attitudes towards the Irish diet. South & Central Americans pay most attention to the intake of fruit and vegetables, and were the most likely to indicate unhealthy dietary change; whereas Asians were the most likely to be satisfied with their diet in Ireland.
- Further research could use dietary intake measurement to verify whether or not the non-nationals' behaviour and attitudes are correlated.

References

- [1] Lennernas M, Fjellström C, Becker W, Giachetti I, Schmitt A, Remaut de Winter A & Kearney M (1997) Influences on food choice perceived to be important by nationally representative samples of adults in the European Union. *Eur J Clin Nutr* **51**, Suppl. 2, S8-S15.
- [2] Glanz K, Brug J & van Assema P (1997) Are awareness of dietary fat intake and actual fat consumption associated?-A Dutch-American comparison. *Eur J Clin Nutr* **51**, 542-547.
- [3] Mellin-Olsen T & Wandel M (2005) Changes in food habits among Pakistani immigrant women in Oslo, Norway. *Ethn Health* **10**, 311-339.
- [4] Lv N & Cason KL (2004) Dietary pattern change and acculturation of Chinese Americans in Pennsylvania. *J Am Diet Assoc* **104**, 771-778.