



Food, Nutrition and Identity Across Diverse Populations

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Abstract: *Ecology of Food and Nutrition (EFN) fosters rigorous scholarly discussions on the interconnected aspects of food and nutrition. The journal's articles explore the dynamic roles of food and food systems in fulfilling human nutritional needs and enhancing overall health and well-being. EFN also provides an important platform for research examining how ecological, social, and cultural factors influence food availability, individual dietary choices, consumption patterns, food traditions, and nutritional health. In the academic field, EFN distinguishes itself as one of the few journals dedicated to publishing articles that explicitly explore the complex intersections of food and nutrition, biological and cultural influences, and broader policy and practice, all from a holistic and global perspective. EFN's mission is to encourage and promote this kind of multidisciplinary scholarship, thereby deepening the understanding of the complexities within the global food and nutrition landscape. The current issue features three articles based on studies. Each contributes uniquely to our understanding of food, nutrition, and health, covering tribal communities in India, migrant entrepreneurship in London, and athletes in Mexico. Together, they illustrate the multifaceted relationships among food, identity, health, and socioeconomic conditions across diverse global populations.*

Key Words: Food, Nutrition, health, dietary choices, food availability, nutritional needs

This article by Barik and colleagues examines the nutritional status of mothers and children under five among the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) in Uttar Pradesh, India. Using a cross-sectional approach, the study reports troubling rates of maternal undernutrition (49.3%) and child malnutrition (wasting: 28.4%, stunting: 33%, underweight: 31.2%). Multivariate analysis reveals that socioeconomic factors, including maternal education, occupation, and household economic status, are strongly associated with undernutrition. This article focuses on an understudied and marginalized population using rigorous anthropometric methods. It examines the relationship between maternal and child nutritional outcomes and sociodemographic factors. This research provides essential public health evidence for targeted policy efforts and highlights the intergenerational cycle of undernutrition in tribal communities.

The article by Tran and Murphy explores how cookery classes serve as a platform for forced migrants in London to pursue entrepreneurship and develop a sense of belonging. Through interviews and ethnographic observations, the study shows

how food-related work helps migrants build leadership skills, challenge stereotypes, and achieve social integration. The authors creatively present food as both an economic resource and a form of cultural capital. They highlight migrant voices and lived experiences, contributing to scholarship on migration and entrepreneurship with an emphasis on empowerment. The study demonstrates how food entrepreneurship can be a unifying and empowering force in migrant settlement, countering the typical negative narratives of forced migration.

The article by Magana and Datta presents the results of an anthropometric study comparing body composition, somatotype, and body frame size among non-elite weightlifters and taekwondo athletes in Merida, Mexico. The study finds significant sex differences and confirms that somatotype is a more accurate indicator of body composition than BMI, especially in distinguishing between fat and muscle mass. The article provides detailed anthropometric data on an underrepresented population, using ISAK standards and reliability checks. It offers practical insights for sports training and athlete development. This study



emphasizes the importance of kinanthropometry in sports science and highlights the need for customized nutritional and training programs for emerging athletes in Mexico.

Across these studies, nutrition is both a biological and socio-cultural construct, shaped by identity, opportunity, and environment. Whether in the forests of Uttar Pradesh, the kitchens of London, or the training centers of Merida, food and body composition are deeply rooted in systems of inequality, resilience, and transformation. Collectively, the articles high-light the structural determinants of health (poverty, education, occupa-tion) and empowerment through food (as a means of identity, entrepreneurship, or athletic development), and they make a compelling case for interdisciplinary approaches to food and nutrition research -integrating public health, migration studies, anthropology, and sports science.

The Significance of Food in Shaping Identity

- Food plays a vital role in shaping individual and collective identities, especially in multicultural societies.

- Every dish served carries stories of the past, reflecting a person's cultural heritage and influencing how connections are formed and maintained within communities.

- Sharing meals reinforces cultural identities while embracing differences, creating a rich tapestry of flavors, stories, and relationships.

Cultural Sensitivity in Nutrition

- Nutrition guidelines often don't account for the unique needs of communities of color, leading to disparities in health outcomes.

- A culturally sensitive approach to nutrition includes a client's food preferences, traditions, and current cultural context.

- This approach is crucial in reducing health risks among minoritized communities,

who are disproportionately affected by conditions like type II diabetes and obesity.

Factors Influencing Food Identity

- Regional Ingredients: Local availability of ingredients shapes regional cuisine identities.

- Climate Influence: Weather and geography dictate what is grown and traditionally consumed.

- Trade and Migration: Features of food identity are shaped by the exchange of ingredients and recipes across cultures.

- Economic Factors: Foods with strong identities can influence spending based on perceived prestige or quality.

Preserving Cultural Identity through Nutrition

- Preserving traditional farming practices, supporting local food systems, and facilitating access to culturally diverse and nutritious food options can help preserve cultural identity.

- Integrating cultural preservation into nutrition policies ensures the preservation of cultural identity while promoting optimal nutrition for all.

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