



University of the Western Cape



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## **Socio-cultural factors influencing food consumption patterns in the black African population in an urban township in South Africa**

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## BACKGROUND

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- Food plays an important role in satisfying individuals basic needs,
- Consuming food in excess to the body's needs may lead to undesirable health outcomes.
- Increase in urbanisation among black population
- Dietary Changes due to urbanization
- Eating habits – less structured meals



## Motivation for the study

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- The increasing prevalence of obesity and related risk factors in African population highlighted a need to examine factors associated with food intake
- WHO emphasize the importance of considering social, cultural, political, physical and structural influences in planning effective intervention and management of obesity



## Aim

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- To examine socio-cultural factors that influence food intake in different groups of people residing in a black township in Cape Town



# METHODOLOGY(1)

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A qualitative, exploratory study design to investigate the cultural and social context which influence the use of food is in black African men and women living in an urban township of Cape Town in South Africa.



## METHODOLOGY (2)

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- Participants were a subset of men and women who participated in a cross-sectional study, designed to collect data on the prevalence and risk factors for cardiovascular diseases in the black population residing in Khayelitsha
- The vast majority of the residents have moved from a rural setting to this urban township and have been in the city for more than five years.



## METHODOLOGY (3)

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- All subjects were selected based on their responses to the question “I eat whenever food is available”.
- A purposive sampling procedure
- 32 men and women (6 for in-depth interviews, 26 for focus group discussions).
- Participants were invited by the Community Health Workers working in the township to meet at a community center on the day of the study A purposive sampling procedure



## METHODOLOGY(4)

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### In-depth interviews

- Participants told a story about food.
- An open-ended question “what does food mean to you?”, “for what purposes is food used in your family and in your community?”
- Reflexive statements and accompanying probes were used during the interviews. Each participant was allowed to talk until the topic was exhausted.



## METHODOLOGY(5)

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### Four focus group discussions

- With 26 participants in whom the meaning of food was further discussed, and controversial issues were further explored
- Data was summarised according to emerging themes.



## FINDINGS: General Perceptions about food

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While men depended on women preparing the food they eat, they see themselves as responsible for supporting the family.

Men loved tasty food and felt that a meal is not complete without meat, especially red meat.

*"I do not decide what to eat, I am just invited to the table and find food ready. I am a man, I have to eat meat everyday. Eating fish or chicken is like having a starter to a men"*



## FINDINGS: General perceptions about food

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Women's perceptions are centered on satisfaction of family's needs.

*"I have to feed my family to make them happy. Even if there is nothing to eat I have to make some means to get food somewhere"*

- *"If I want to please my husband I prepare his favorite meal (food), which usually includes meat. My husband will never eat food if there is no meat in the plate."*



## FINDINGS: Theme 1

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### **The meaning of food in relation to health**

- Some food are dangerous to the body  
*"If one eat lots of fat and salt when they go to the clinic they are told they have Hi-hi"*
- Lack of certain nutrients results in diseases  
*"Poor people especially children who do not eat well suffer from malnutrition"*



## FINDINGS: Theme 2

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### **The relationship of food to the body size and image**

Some felt that people are what they eat. They also felt that people's body size is related to socio-economic standing.

*“If I work to earn money it needs to be shown on my family that I can feed them, they need to be fresh and round. I won't be respected if my family goes hungry.”*



## **FINDINGS: Theme 3**

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### **The social meaning of food**

Food is used to show love, acceptance and humanity (ubuntu).

*“If you visit someone’s house and not given food, you feel that you are not welcomed.”*

*“Whenever people meet socially food should be served, otherwise people are not happy”*



## FINDINGS: Theme 4

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### **The values attached to food**

- "People who have enough food to eat are fresh (plump) and happy unlike those who do not have enough food, they are thin and very unhappy."*
- "Lean meat and black tea is only used during mourning period. When we celebrate we need fatty meat and white tea."*
- "Eating beans and vegetables is associated with being poor"*



## FINDINGS: Theme 5

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### **The changing values about food**

*“In the city food is no longer easily available. Every food is bought. Everything has to be budgeted for. People are no longer cooking extra food in case a visitor comes. They are now counting pieces of meat according to the number of family members. When a visitor comes they have to resort to tea and drinks. At times a visitor comes when you do not even have sugar. It becomes difficult even to go as ask your neighbours to give you some sugar like in the rural areas where we used to borrow and share the little we had. In the city we struggle. People live for themselves.”*



## **FINDINGS: Theme 5 (continued)**

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- Once they move to the city their materialistic needs increase, leading to competition among neighbours, friends and families. As their income is sometimes not adequate to meet all of their needs, they often start buying food and furniture on credit. Making credit repayments reduces the money available for food and in this way food is sacrificed for material possessions.
- They then sacrifice healthy food and buy cheap unhealthy food



# Discussions

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- Eating behaviors are learned during socialization
- Carried over from generation to generation
- Information to be used constructively to help people choose food wisely to prevent over nutrition and associated risk factors



# CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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- This study illustrates the strong social, cultural and economic influences on eating patterns in this population.
- It emphasizes the critical importance of taking these factors into consideration in developing strategies for modifying eating practices.
- Information in this paper is a useful starting point for developing suitable interventions in this type of population.



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## SOCIAL MEANING OF FOOD

