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A STUDY OF THE MEDICAL AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT OF FOOD AND NUTRITIONAL TABOOS PRACTICED IN ENUGU STATE, EASTERN NIGERIA

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Statement of problem: Food Taboos are foods and beverages, which are abstained from consuming for religious, cultural or hygienic reasons. These food taboos and habits however, have adverse impact on the health and socio-economic status of the Nigerian population especially the vulnerable groups- the women, pregnant women, children and the elderly. Food taboos have a long history especially in the developing countries like Nigeria. All communities in Nigeria practice a form of cultural (traditional) food taboo and Enugu State is no exception. This paper examined some food and nutritional taboos practiced in Nigeria and the medical and socio-economic impact.

Methodology: This study utilized random sampling and in depth interviews of 185 people between the ages of 20years and 70years. This is to ascertain the opinions of the population and to articulate their perspective of food taboo within their respective locality. In addition, to possibly determine the types of food avoided as taboos, the reasons and possible origin of the taboo, the most vulnerable and possible relationship between the practiced food taboo, medical and socio-economic status.

Findings: Study showed that these cultural practices are based mostly on learned or acquired behavior over years from parents, and/ or a conscious observation of the behavior of relatives and other close members of the community. Also they govern particular phases of the human life cycle and special events such as menstrual period, pregnancy, childbirth, lactation, and preparation for hunts, battles, weddings and funerals. Certain meats, meat parts and eggs are most avoided as taboo. Pregnant women and children are mostly involved in food taboos while the men are least involved.

Conclusion and significance: Pregnant women and children are mostly involved in food taboos. However, these populations appear ignorant and unconcerned on the medical and socio-economic impact.

Recommendation: Community education, campaign in schools and during antenatal/postnatal visits will go a long way towards effective fight against food taboos, improve the nutritional status and reduce malnutrition/micronutrient deficiencies among Nigerians.

Biography

Ikeyi Pauline Adachukwu is the Head of department and a principal lecturer in the department of Science laboratory Technology, Institute of Management and technology, Enugu, Nigeria. She specializes in medical biochemistry and biotechnology. She has put in over 20 years of teaching, research and administration in educational institutions in Nigeria. She has authored and co-authored books in biochemistry and biotechnology and has published widely in both local and international journals. Currently she has focused her researches and passion towards improving the health and wellbeing of her people.

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