



Motivators and facilitators of fruit and vegetable intake in Tonga

E.L. Mitchell^{1,2}, C. Ake³, S.J.R. Underhill¹ and S.J. Burkhart^{1,2}

¹Australian Centre for Pacific islands Research, University of the Sunshine Coast, Queensland, Australia, 4557

²School of Health, University of the Sunshine Coast, Queensland, Australia, 4557

³MORDI Tonga, PO Box 996, Nuku'alofa, Tonga

Food choice is complex and is heavily influenced by the environment one lives in⁽¹⁾. Pacific Island food environments, including those in Tonga, have changed considerably in recent years, making healthier food choice more challenging⁽²⁾. A widespread nutrition transition across the region has contributed to an increase in the availability of, and accessibility to, highly-processed foods, and high rates of diet-related non-communicable diseases⁽³⁾. While system change is needed to support the availability, accessibility and affordability of healthy foods, nutrition education plays an important role in supporting individuals, communities, and populations to navigate their rapidly changing food environments, and to encourage healthy food choice and behaviour change. Approaches to nutrition education in the Pacific Islands region vary and do not always consider the socio-cultural aspects of the food environment, especially when focusing on fruit and vegetable consumption. This work was driven by an intent to develop contextually appropriate nutrition education plans using a structured process, Design Online⁽⁴⁾. However, to develop a nutrition education plan a critical analysis of the current motivators and facilitators for the behaviour are required. When reviewing the scientific literature there is limited information on determinants of food choice within Tonga, and more broadly within the Pacific Islands context. Therefore, the aim of this cohort study was to qualitatively explore and document the motivating and facilitating determinants of fruit and vegetable consumption in Tonga. Data collection took place during August and September 2023 on the main island of Tongatapu. Semi-structured interviews (n = 5 men, 3 women) and a focus group (n = 4 women) based on the most appropriate method of engaging with participants, were conducted in Tongan. Guiding questions were derived from Design Online and proposed within the following categories: motivating determinants and facilitating determinants. Interview responses were qualitatively analysed using an inductive content analysis model. Key categories for motivating determinants included health and nutrition knowledge, normal consumption patterns, availability and access, production, financial considerations and preferences, perceptions and practices. Key categories for facilitating determinants included education, community engagement, environmental factors, food preference, finance, and accessibility. While this work has explored motivating and facilitating determinants for fruit and vegetable consumption in Tonga with a small sample, it makes an important contribution to the limited literature. The findings of this study can be used to underpin activities, such as the design of nutrition education plans. The findings also provide a foundation for further exploration of determinants of food choice. This study was undertaken on the main island of Tongatapu, but it is of interest to explore determinants with communities who live in the outer islands, and at different time points during the year to reflect seasonality.

Keywords: nutrition education; fruit and vegetables; motivators; facilitators

Ethics Declaration

Yes

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