

FOOD BELIEFS AND THE FREQUENCY OF FOOD INTAKE

A.C.BELL*, A.M.STEWART*, A.J.RADFORD*, and P.CAIRNEY**

Insight may be gained into human food habits by studying the cognitive factors in the psychology of the food consumer.

In this paper we examine the relationship between food beliefs and the frequency of food intake for six individuals of different socio-economic profile.

Individuals' food beliefs were represented on a repertory grid (Kelly, 1955) and a computerized factor analysis technique (Slater, 1967) used to cluster and rank order (sort into dimensions) the food beliefs according to their relative importance as discriminators of food items. The food beliefs of relative first importance as discriminators of food were qualitatively similar for all subjects and related to the perceived health, convenience, goodness, taste and nutritious properties of food. Food beliefs of relative second and third importance for individuals were dissimilar in content and reflect the unique perspectives with which different individuals view food.

All individuals kept a 7-day food intake record. Multiple regression analysis was used to examine the correlation between an individual's evaluation of ten food items, in terms of the individual's three most important dimensions of food belief, and the frequency with which the food was eaten.

It was found for each individual that beliefs of relative first importance were the predominant predictors of the frequency of a particular food's intake. The correlation coefficient describing the strength of the relationship between an individual's food beliefs of relative first importance and the frequency of a particular food's intake was high, averaging 0.91. Addition of food beliefs of relative second and third importance as variables predictive of the frequency of a food item's intake gave only marginal increase in the prediction accuracy. The average increase in the correlation coefficient was 0.01.

The factor analysis of a food belief repertory grid is a method useful to

- (a) assess the nature and structure of individual or group's food belief system
- (b) give insight into how nutrition knowledge can be translated and transmitted in the meaningful idiom of the food consumer

and (c) project possible changes in the frequency of choice of a food item which would result from interventions to change the personal cognitive evaluation of a food item.

Kelly, G.A. (1955) "The Psychology of Personal Constructs", New York, W.W.Norton.

Slater, P. (1967) "Notes on INGRID 67", Academic Department of Psychiatry, Clare House, St Georges Hospital, Tooting, London. S.W. 17

* School of Medicine) Flinders University of South Australia
 ** School of Social Sciences) Bedford Park, South Australia, 5042.