

FOOD BELIEF AND ATTITUDE DIFFERENCES IN RESPONDERS/NON-RESPONDERS TO A FOOD EDUCATION CAMPAIGN

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In 1978 a food education campaign was conducted in the town of Strathalbyn, South Australia, by members of the Gastroenterology Society of Australia. Various forms of media, ranging from cartoons in a weekly paper to community group talks, were used to communicate an "eat more fibre-containing-food" message. Sales of laxatives, bread, breakfast cereals and bran were monitored in the town before, during and after the campaign and changes in sales of these commodities taken as "outcome" criteria for the evaluation of campaign effectiveness. There was, however, no "process" evaluation (Lewin 1979) to determine the effect of the campaign on community members' personal food beliefs and attitudes vis-a-vis these commodities.

In a study which was independent of and commenced after the campaign, we undertook an investigation to assess food belief and attitude differences between two age/sex matched groups: Group A members (N = 5) indicated an increased consumption of bran and wholemeal bread in response to the campaign. Group B (N = 5) indicated no current or previous consumption of bran and wholemeal bread. The purpose of the study was to further develop a new research method and technique as an instrument for "process" evaluation.

Group members' personal beliefs about locally available foods, including wholemeal bread, white bread, bran and breakfast cereal, were collected in accordance with Personal Construct Theory methodology and represented on a Repertory grid (Bell, et al, 1981). A synopsis of each group's food beliefs, which became the basis of an assessment of group attitude to consumption of those foods, was obtained from Principal Component Analysis of the group Repertory grid (Slater, 1967). Principal Component Analysis of between-group differences indicated major differences in belief were with respect to perceived taste, necessity-for-a-well-balanced-diet, texture, nutritious and health promoting attributes of bran and wholemeal bread.

These belief differences made group food behaviour differences intelligible and generated working hypotheses as to what might be salient and relevant belief variables determining and reflecting other community members' response to the campaign message.

Personal Construct Theory methodology is a consumer-centred hermeneutic research approach which, in this study, was useful to detect language and concepts of potential significance in the process of community food communication. Such local and specific consumer food belief information is important as a basis from which to design a community food education programme that can be perceived by community members as intelligible and relevant to their own food beliefs and food habits.

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