

COMMUNITY AWARENESS OF ISSUES CURRENTLY ADDRESSED BY NUTRITION EDUCATION

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Over the past decade a number of nutrition education campaigns have been conducted based on the recommendations included in the Dietary Guidelines. Despite this, recent population surveys indicate that the average Australian diet has changed little since the late 1970's, still containing excess fat, sodium and simple carbohydrate, and inadequate fibre and complex carbohydrate (English et al, 1987; Baghurst et al, 1988).

While there is limited evidence suggesting that educational efforts may have been successful in raising community awareness of the importance of diet to health (Worsley and Crawford, 1985; Crawford et al, 1987), national data regarding the population's nutritional attitudes is lacking. During July-August 1988 a survey of 1500 adults randomly selected from metropolitan Perth, Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane was conducted to assess community awareness of a number of the issues addressed by recent nutrition education campaigns.

A preliminary inspection of early data from the survey reveals that a majority of the respondents reported they have attempted to, or are aware that they should reduce their consumption of a range of nutrients. For example, 90% were concerned with or had tried to reduce their fat intake, and 70%-80% were concerned with their intakes of cholesterol, sodium, simple carbohydrate and energy. Slightly fewer respondents (approximately 65%) were aware of the need to increase fibre consumption and a majority were confused about complex carbohydrate intake. When asked which one nutrient or food constituent they were most concerned with in their own diets, approximately one in three respondents cited fat, 20% mentioned food additives or preservatives and 10%-15% mentioned fibre. Sodium and sugar were cited by less than 10% of respondents.

More than 90% of the sample were aware of the major health problems and diseases which are related to fat, and some 70% were conscious of the health risks associated with high sodium and high simple carbohydrate intakes. However, there appeared to be more uncertainty concerning the relationship between dietary fibre and disease, with only half of the respondents reporting they were aware of the role of fibre in preventing disease.

Data relating to other concerns of the community, such as food labelling and information needs will also be presented. Finally, differences between the sexes and age groups will be discussed, as will the implications of these results for nutrition education.

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