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Food Security and Health Risk Behaviours in Sub-Saharan Africa During the Covid-19 Lockdown

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Abstract

Introduction: Globally, the food security of millions of people is currently being threatened by the COVID-19 pandemic - an evolving health and human crisis. Soon, the combined effects of COVID-19 itself, as well as control measures and the emerging global recession could disrupt the functioning of food systems, if precautionary actions are not taken. The study was aimed at evaluating the state of food security in various African populations during the COVID-19 pandemic and assessing the health risk that may be associated with populations' lifestyle during the lockdown.

Methodology: This research was an online cross-sectional survey. An online questionnaire was designed, and content validated. Six countries were selected for this research – South Africa, Nigeria, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Ghana, and Kenya. Research assistants were sent the online survey link to circulate in their respective countries for 6 weeks (June/July 2020). The questionnaire was structured to gather socio-economic data, information on food security and lifestyle of the participants (including a food frequency questionnaire) before and during the COVID-19 lockdown.

Results: It was observed that there was no glaring food security problem in the surveyed population (817 respondents) which was mainly highly educated with a monthly income above or equal to 100 USD, although the central region (Cameroon) reported a relatively higher number of respondents with a monthly income of less than 100USD. Generally, the food frequency results showed that cooked vegetables, fruits, and teas appeared as consumed frequently (3-5 times a week) by Eastern African populations. This pattern was similar in Southern Africa but not in Central and West Africa where these seemed to be less consumed (<3 times per week). In West Africa, starchy meals as well as white rice and boiled or fried eggs were more consumed (3-5 times a week). A very low consumption of processed/unhealthy foods and drinks was noticed. South Africa appeared as the country presenting the highest risk of NCDs resurgence due to physical inactivity, alcohol and tobacco consumption related to COVID-19 lockdown.

Conclusion: Consumption of healthy diets should be encouraged and promoted, especially by the relevant authorities during this pandemic, food security being a key target.

Biography: [Eridiong Onyenweaku](#)

Eridiong Onyenweaku is a nutritionist and biochemist who's currently working on a research at the Food Evolution Research Laboratory, School of Tourism & Hospitality, College of Business & Economics at University of Johannesburg. She also lectures at the University of Calabar and is interested in finding nutrition solutions to health challenges. She is passionate about nutrition and is committed to her work.