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The nutritional and social importance of meat consumption: Comparison of young men in urban and rural Zambia

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Background: Global demand for meat and dairy products has escalated with the demand particularly increasing in East and South Asia and Latin America countries. The effect has been termed the livestock revolution. These consumption patterns have serious consequences for environmental sustainability and food security.

Objective: The aim of this study was to assess the nutritional contribution of meat in the diet of young adult men in urban and rural Zambian populations. It was also to ascertain the social and psychological importance of meat in the two populations.

Methods: A mixed method study, 20 male participants of 18-30 years of age was selected each from the urban area (Lusaka) and the rural area (Chongwe). Food frequency questionnaire, 24-hour dietary recall for 4 days, anthropometric measurements, qualitative interviews and a background questionnaire were used to collect demographic data and nutrient intake data. Nutri Survey dietary software, SPSS and NVIVO were used for analysis.

Results: Participants at both locations had an isocaloric diet. All macronutrients intakes except carbohydrates were significantly higher in urban population as compared to rural population. There was 15% protein contribution to energy as compared to 11.5% protein contribution to energy among rural population ($P < 0.05$). Also urban population had protein and fat intakes above the expected recommended intakes. Chicken was viewed as meat for visitors and showing respect/authority at household level, beef was considered meat for the wealthy and highly essential for successful celebrations.

Conclusions: The study found difference in nutrient and behaviors relating to the consumption of meat. This study revealed a clear evidence of nutrition transition as the urban population had consumption similar to the western world. Lastly participants held strong social and cultural importance to meat consumption detailing the symbolic meanings of these meats such as respect, authority, good gesture and prosperity among others. Interventions could be developed weaving in these specific cultural beliefs to achieve healthy eating practices.

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