Factors affecting food choice and the food environment during COVID-19: A cross sectional study in Samoa

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Acknowledgements

• Translators: Leslie Panapa, Saunima’a Ma Fulu Aiolupotea

• Field Coordinators: Waiketi and Mika

• All of the participants who kindly took part in this study

• Funded by USC
• The COVID 19 pandemic has affected all systems including the food system.

• In the PICs globalization, and increased cash based economies have accompanied an increased reliance on imported, highly processed foods[6] and a corresponding risk to food security and public health[7].

• In an analysis of a 2018 nationally representative report, it was estimated at 26.8% of population was experiencing moderate to severe food insecurity and that 18.8% of the population was below the poverty line[8]. In children under the age of 5 years, the prevalence of wasting was 3.7%, stunting 4.7% and obesity 5.4%[8]. 39% of the food consumed came from cereals and meat, mainly imported products – rice/bread and chicken[8].

• Although a recent study was conducted on the impact on farmers, market, vendors and consumers in several PICs, including Samoa, currently there is no published study that describes specific food behaviours as a result of COVID 19.
Aim

This study seeks to address this gap in knowledge, by examining perceptions of:

- food pricing,
- food availability,
- barriers to cooking methods,
- foods consumed, and
- culturally contextual practices such as bartering and sharing and emergent practices such as bulk buying, as a result of COVID-19.

*Today we will be focusing on food pricing, availability, food consumption*
Method

- Observational cross-sectional study design, across 5 weeks (mid November – mid December 2020)

- Modified strategy: 34 third year nursing students and 2 nursing faculty distributed surveys in their communities → returned them to student coordinators (one for Upolu and one for Savaii)

- Snowball sample of adults across Upolu and Savaii.

- Participant completed survey

- Eligibility criteria included adult residents of Samoa able to read/speak English or Samoan

- Ethical approval for this project was provided by the National University of Samoa (15-11-18-1.)

Survey questions included:

- Self-report demographics

- Perception of changes to the food environment and food security (FIES) prior to and during the COVID-19 emergency measures

- Perception of impact of COVID-19 on:
  - facilities, amenities,
  - food availability,
  - barriers to cooking and/or baking,
  - consumption of food groups (protective foods, body building foods, energy foods, food and drink choices that are high in fat, salt and/or sugar and other drinks) since the COVID state of emergency
  - changes in practices (storage, bulk buying and sharing/bartering)

- Open and closed questions
Participant characteristics

- 197 adult Samoans
- 61% married, 25% single, 14% divorced/widowed or prefer not to say
- 49% completed University, 46% Secondary school

Table 1. Participant characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Urban</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Rural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Apia Urban</td>
<td>North West Upolu</td>
<td>Rest of Upolu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(n= 53)</td>
<td>(n = 57)</td>
<td>(n= 34)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age in years</td>
<td>39.27 (21 – 79)</td>
<td>40.02 (19 – 73)</td>
<td>43.27 (23 – 61)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(mean, range)</td>
<td>39.73 (23 – 69)</td>
<td></td>
<td>39.73 (23 – 69)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender* n (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>32 (60)</td>
<td>31 (54)</td>
<td>24 (71)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>20 (38)</td>
<td>23 (40)</td>
<td>9 (26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fa’aafafine</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2 (4)</td>
<td>1 (3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*9 did not provide location, *8 reported ‘prefer not to say’ or was not recorded
Food pricing and availability

Overall, 40% reported that in general food prices increased, 11% decreased and 32% remained the same.
Changes in diets: Bodybuilding foods

Figure 3. Reported change in consumption of bodybuilding foods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food</th>
<th>Proportion of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Legumes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuts/seeds</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dairy products</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eggs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local fish/seafood</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imported fish/seafood</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local lean meats</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meat with visible fat</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Processed meat</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vegetarian alternatives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Don’t eat/not provided
- Eat about the same
- Eat less
- Eat more
Changes in diets: Protective foods

Figure 4. Reported change in consumption of protective foods

- Fresh fruit
- Frozen fruit
- Canned/dried fruit
- Fruit juice
- Fresh vegetables
- Frozen vegetables
- Canned vegetables
- Coconut cream

Proportion of participants

Legend:
- Don’t eat/not provided
- Eat about the same
- Eat less
- Eat more
Changes in diets: Energy foods

Figure 5. Reported change in consumption of energy foods

- Don’t eat/not provided
- Eat about the same
- Eat less
- Eat more

Foods:
- Roots and tubers
- Brown bread/noodles
- White bread/noodles
- Brown rice
- White rice
Changes in diets: Discretionary foods

Figure 6. Reported change in consumption of discretionary foods

Proportion of participants

Foods

- Sweet snacks
- Bakery items
- Sugar sweetened beverages
- Salty snacks
- Deep fried foods
- Alcoholic drinks
- Non-sugar drinks

- Don’t eat/not provided
- Eat about the same
- Eat less
- Eat more
Food insecurity

You or others in your household worry/worried about not having enough food to eat because of a lack of money or resources?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Before COVID-19</th>
<th>COVID-19</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>16% Yes</td>
<td>27% Yes, 7% Yes more than before</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>26% Yes</td>
<td>30% Yes, 19% Yes more than before</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Your household ran out of food because of a lack of money or resources?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Before COVID-19</th>
<th>COVID-19</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>17% Yes</td>
<td>19% Yes, 11% Yes more than before</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>9% Yes</td>
<td>13% Yes, 6% Yes more than before</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion and conclusions

Our findings are self-reported, however it is likely that:

• COVID-19 has had some impact on food choice

• COVID-19 has impacted food pricing and availability

• COVID-19 has impacted food security, possibly related to financial resources

• Impact of COVID-19 is seen slightly differently in urban vs. rural populations

While we have only undertaken preliminary analysis, we will be looking at other associations, for example gender and household size.
Thank you

Fa'afetai

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