

Food enculturation and acculturation in Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) and international university students when living at and away from home

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Both international and black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) students are becoming growing contributors to the student population in the UK, however the community remains invisible in literature⁽¹⁾. Eating behaviour and an individual's personal food system is multidimensional and is influenced by a myriad of factors⁽²⁾. For ethnic minorities an added factor includes maintaining cultural traditions through food. This is known as 'dietary enculturation', whereby an individual does not fully assimilate to the dominant society and maintains their ascribed cultural traditions, norms and eating habits. However, in some cases food acculturation - adopting the dietary practices and customs of the dominant culture is exhibited in the eating behaviours of ethnic minorities, particularly in second-generation migrants⁽³⁾. This study aimed to examine the extent of dietary acculturation and dietary enculturation on the influence of BAME home and international student's food choices. Ethical approval was granted by the School of Sport and Exercise Sciences Ethics committee (reference number: 20/SPS_Marsh/NU/012). Sixty participants (forty-one BAME home students and nineteen international students) were recruited by purposive sampling. Data collection involved self-administered questionnaires (n = 43) and semi structured interviews (n = 17). The results were analysed using thematic analysis⁽⁴⁾. Authors 1 and 2 conducted the repeated readings and coding independently and a general consensus was reached following discussions between all authors to ensure the validity of the data interpretations. When living away from home, six major themes influenced the eating behaviour of the studied population: 1) social environment; 2) individual factors; 3) physical environment; 4) university life; 5) enculturation; 6) acculturation. When at home, only five major themes were influential: 1) social environment; 2) individual factors; 3) physical environment; 4) enculturation; 5) acculturation. Enculturation was shown to influence the dietary behaviour of both international students and BAME home students. Ethnic food plays a fundamental role in affirming one's identity and despite increased autonomy during university term time, some students still practiced eating habits which reflect cultural acquisition. However, the overall practice with regards to culture was that both international students and BAME students were more accustomed to adopting westernised eating behaviours. Our findings suggest dietary enculturation is a factor that influences the dietary behaviour of both international students and BAME home students. The results of this study could be considered as a contribution to understanding the underlying factors influencing the eating behaviours of minority ethnic groups and sojourning students, which can help educators and health professionals cater to the needs of minority groups. Further longitudinal studies are now needed to measure the dietary habits of international and BAME students across their academic journey to show whether dietary acculturation decreases or increases alongside the time spent with increased autonomy.

References

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