

Association between Home-Cooking Frequency and Nutrient Intake Adequacy among Working Women in Malaysia

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Abstract

Women, especially those already married, usually will manage most household chores, including cooking. However, more significant percentage of married women have worked for a living in addition to doing household chores now ^[1]. Due to the long hours of working, it is hard for the women to frequently prepare meals at home, resulting in a lower quality of nutrient intake. The convenience meals, fast food, and other foods cooked outside the house are linked with a significantly greater calorie, sodium, and fat intake and a poorer intake of micronutrients ^[2].

This cross-sectional study aims to determine the association between home cooking frequency and nutrient intake adequacy among working women in Malaysia. A total of 131 working women in Malaysia aged 18 to 60 were recruited using a convenience sampling method after excluding 9 participants due to the underreported dietary intake. The participants must answer the questionnaire regarding the frequency of cooking at home in a week. The nutrient intake is determined based on the 24-hours dietary recall and analyzed using Nutritionist Pro™ version 5.4.0 software. The participants were able to track their daily nutrient intake and home cooking frequency within a week.

The participants (median age: 27.0 ± 17 years) were aged between 18 to 60 years old, predominantly married (51.1%), Malay (96.9%), and full-time workers (92.4%), with monthly income for most of the participants (78.6%) are ≤ RM 4 850. Also, 52% of the participants work in the government sector and most current work at Terengganu (48.1%). Also, the majority of the participants do not have any children below 18 years old (70.2%). Most of them live together with their husband and children (41.2%), followed by parents (29%).

Table 1: Frequency of home cooking in a week (n= 131)

Variables	Home cooking frequency, n (%)			Media n (IQR)	p value
	Low (0- 2/week)	Medium (3-5/week)	High (6- 7/week)		
Breakfast	82 (62.6%)	30 (22.9%)	19 (14.5%)	9.0 (10.0)	*0.028
Morning tea	108 (82.4%)	17 (13.0%)	6 (4.6%)		0.213
Lunch	76 (58.0%)	31 (58.0%)	24 (18.3%)		*0.013
Evening tea	111 (84.7%)	19 (14.5%)	1 (0.8%)		0.323
Dinner	56 (42.7%)	48 (36.6%)	27 (20.8%)		0.085

Table 2: Total Healthy Eating Index (HEI) score among participants

Healthy Eating Index (HEI) Score	Rating	n (%)
Less than 51	Poor	71 (54.2%)
51 – 79	Fair	56 (42.7%)
More than 80	Good	4 (3.1%)

Most participants reported that they only tended to cook at home between zero to twice a week. Nevertheless, this study indicates that the median energy consumption is somewhat lower, at 1362 kcal, compared to the median energy intake of women from the 2014 Malaysian Adult Nutrition Survey (MANS), which is 1445 kcal [3]. More than half of the individuals (54.2 %) had a poor diet, with scores of less than 51.

To conclude, from this study, it is reported that most working women do not get a proper nutrient intake due to the long working hours and other responsibilities. This study revealed that adequate nutritional intake differed considerably between working women who regularly cooked throughout the week and those who did not. Understanding healthy food and ingredient selection along with healthy preparation may improve dietary habits while cooking food at home. Hence, simply devoting time to cooking food at home may not result in a healthy diet since other variables such as socioeconomic position, attitudes, and family preparation abilities may impact diet quality.

Keyword

Home-cooking frequency; Working women; Nutrient intake

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