**Approaching food choice profiling related to socioeconomic status: findings from the Nutrition, Environment and Cardiovascular Health (NESCaV) study in Wallonia**

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**Abstract**

**Background**

Unbalanced eating habits are known to be one of the most striking risk factors related to several diseases such as cardiovascular diseases and obesity. Furthermore, various studies have shown that there are large and persistent socioeconomic inequalities in health across many populations in the world. These inequalities have been associated with specific disparities in nutrition and food choices. Factors that influence dietary intakes are only partly understood and the findings of food choice disparities between population segments are not always consistent. The purpose of the study was to assess the importance of socioeconomic status (SES) in determining the food choice disparities within a population.

**Methods**

Cross-sectional data were collected from a randomly selected population sample of 1017 residents of Wallonia in the context of the interregional Nutrition, Environment and Cardiovascular Health (NESCaV) study. Dietary intake data were obtained by means of a Food Frequency Questionnaire (FFQ) which reports the frequency of consumption and portion size of 146 items over the last 3 months. Two indicators of socioeconomic status were retained for this study: educational achievement and perception of income. Food intakes were log transformed in order to improve the normality of their distribution. Ordinal logistic regression was applied to assess the association of socioeconomic factors with food choice while adjusting for age and sex.

**Results**

Socioeconomic status (SES) was associated with items of all food groups. SES was strongly associated with the consumption of white bread, sugar, soft drinks and wine even after adjustment for age and sex (p<0.0001). Education achievement (EA) was found to be significantly associated with higher consumption of muesli (p=0,027), olive oil (p=0,022), tee (0,006) and wine (p<0.0001). Education achievement was significantly associated with lower consumption of various foods in particular white bread (p<0.0001), potatoes (p=0,001), fried food (p=0,045), margarine (p=0,041), whole milk (p=0,002), sugar (p<0.0001) and soft drinks (p<0.0001). When choosing perception of income as socioeconomic indicator, results were quite different.

**Conclusions**

This study draws attention to the potential effect of specific socioeconomic factors on food choice. It also stresses out that the findings are highly dependent on the nature of the socioeconomic indicator used. More in-depth analysis, however, may allow specifying food choice profiles related to socioeconomic status.