

INFLUENCE OF FAST FOOD CENTERS ON FAMILY LIFE STYLE IN UMUAHIA NORTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, ABIA STATE, NIGERIA

DR. A. S. UMEH

Department of Home Economics/Hotel Management and Tourism,
Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike,
Abia State.

And

Q. N. NWARIE

Department of Home Economics/Hotel Management and Tourism,
Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike,
Abia State.

Abstract

This study was carried out in Umuahia North Local Government Area to assess the influence of fast food centers on family lifestyle. The sample of the study comprised of 1120 families. A validated questionnaire was used to elicit information from the socio-economic characteristics of respondents, the frequency of intake of food in fast food centers, and the patronage of fast food centers per week. The changes in family lifestyle of the respondents frequenting fast food centers, all these were analyzed statistically the result showed that a greater number of families obtained their meals from home and fast food centers. The study revealed that children from homes that depend on fast food centers do not have the skill to cook well, they are lazy at home, and they find it difficult to wash plates at home because at fast food centers they dispose the plates. Buying of Fast foods also affected their family income and social life. The study also showed that families who patronize fast food centers see it as a means to show off affluence. In recommendation, Government through the ministry of women affairs should encourage the various households especially women to bring back the idea of preparing home -made meals. The pastors that conduct marriage counseling should also emphasize on women preparing good and nutritious meals at home for their family members.

Keywords: Fast, food, life, style and family

The fast food centers which are found in the major streets of most towns in the country today is a sector of the catering industry concerned with the production and service of food and beverages quickly for immediate sale to customers for consumption either on or off the centres (Davis and Stones, 2010). They are usually themed around a product of people and class of their customers, a range of product or products of people and the class of their customer (Davis and Stone, 2010).

The operation of these centers is displayed to a varying extent by different types of service. Within the fast food catering market, there are different levels of operation which range from take away services to catering establishments, the products are very well marketed and methods of food services is simplified and basic. The menu ranges is usually larger, high prices are charged and waiter's service to the table is usually the norm (IBID). The food production styles used by fast food centers are dictated to a large extent by high percentage of convenience and ready to use foods by these centers. There is a more leisurely dining atmosphere and customers may take over an hour to consume their meals.

Generally, all aspects of fast food operation are highly standardized. The hectic pale of life today has encouraged the eating of fast food and hasty meals. The high cost of living has led parents to work longer hours and single parents whose economic situation is usually more precarious are faced even with greater strain, and so cannot provide the meal at home due to lack of time. Even children have many commitments such as sports and other after school activities all these have encouraged the patronage of fast food centers in Abia State (Frank, 2010). As a result, family meals have visibly diminished. This is a remarkable evidence of how rapidly our social connectedness has been changing. The increasing operations of fast food centers especially in urban areas have greatly affected family lifestyle and it is now an irreversible social trend that must be bucked. Life style is the habit, attitudes, morals, standards, economic level etc which altogether constitutes the mode of living of an individual or group (Nwegbu and Echezona2010). A Life style is a characteristic

bundle of behavior that makes sense to others and oneself in a given time and place including social relationship, consumption, entertainment, dressing behaviours, and practices. In order ways lifestyle is a conventional way of doing things and reasoning action. While the Family is a group of people united by ties of marriage, blood or adoption and characterized by common residence and economic cooperation (Anyakoha and Eluwa, 2004). They asserted that it is the function of the family to provide the basic needs such as foods, shelter, clothing love, companion, protection and support to its members .The proliferation of these fast food centers has gradually eroded these functions, most families do not cook meals at home again, not to mention eating the meals together . The children now find it difficult to do kitchen chores like plate washing, cutting vegetables etc which Abia people are known with. If these menaces are not checked it will disintegrate families and there will be no values to hand over to the next generation.

Statement of Problem

The increasing patronage of fast food centres especially in our urban areas has greatly affected the family values and life styles seen in many homes. (Leony 2011). Leony (2011) reported that lack of kitchen utensils and equipments in many homes has led many homes not to prepare those foods prepared in these fast food centers. Also, the inability of mothers to prepare adequate nutritious meal has prompted family members especially children to prefer fast food to homemade meals. Also, it is believed that family meals tie family members together including the extended family together but the establishment of fast food centers has reduced the chances of the family coming together during meals, to share their meals and problems together. The problem is so enormous that if it is not controlled now our younger people will not know how to prepare and cook tasty meals for their families and also there will be more obsessed people as a result of the high intake of junk foods. The proliferation of fast food centers has weakened our family ties and bonds. Thus the aim of this study is to find out how families are influenced by fast food centers and give a solution on how best we can encourage the eating of homemade meals.

Purpose of the Study

The general objective of this study was to examine the influence of fast food centers on family life style in Umuahia North Local Government Area, Abia State.

Specifically the study determined the following;

- the frequency/reasons why families visit the fast food centers,
- the choice of food made by the families while patronizing the fast food centers.
- the factors that promotes the patronage of fast food centers

Research Questions: The following research questions guided the study

1. What are the reasons why families visit fast food centers and how frequently do they do so?
2. What are the choice of foods made by families while patronizing the fast food?
3. What are the factors that promote their patronage to fast food?

Area of the Study: The study was carried out in Umuahia North Local Government of Abia State. It has a land area of about 423, 290 km² with population size of 255,081 people (National Population Census, 2006). It is surrounded by 16 sixteen other Local Government in Abia State. Umuahia North has twenty electoral wards, thirty five autonomous communities with their traditional rulers. Umuahia people are predominantly civil servants, public servants; traders and farmer whose farm produces are cocoa, garri, melon, palm oil, etc.

Population for the Study: The population for the study consisted of all households and civil servants in Umuahia North L.G.A, which was 255,081 (NPC, 2006). The population was made up of married, single parents, divorced and widows in the communities. All these groups were chosen to ensure better coverage of different opinions and also to ensure the reliability of the study.

Samples for the Study: A purposive sampling technique was adopted for the study. To arrive at the specific number of respondents for the study, a multi-stage sampling technique was employed to select 200 respondents. The first stage involved randomly selecting 2 communities where fast food centres are located. That gave a total of 100 respondents. In the second stage, the Umuahia North Local Government Area headquarter staff was purposively selected and these gave a total of 100 respondents giving a total of 200 respondents. The questionnaires were administered within the selected communities in Umuahia North Local Government, the sample were randomly selected as information needed was to be supplied by different families in the communities.

Instrument for Data Collection: The questionnaires were designed on the five point structured questionnaire as follow; Strongly agreed (SA), Agreed (A), Undecided (UD), Disagreed (D) and Strongly Disagreed (SD) to seek the opinions of families in Umuahia North Local Government Area of Abia State regarding the influence of fast food centers on the family life style. A mean rating of 2.50 and above was accepted as cut off point for decision rule while a mean below 2.50 was rejected. It was made up of two sections, A and B. It was validated by 3 experts in Home Economics for face validation of the instrument. They were requested to vet the items for clarity and appropriateness of the items in measuring what they are set to measure. Their comments and suggestions were incorporated in the final draft of the questionnaire. To determine the reliability, the instrument was pretested on 20 households who were not part of the sample. Cronbach Alpha reliability index was used to determine the internal consistency of the instrument. The analyzed data yielded a coefficient of 0.81 which showed that the instrument was reliable.

Data Collection and Analysis Techniques: The questionnaires were distributed to the office and households in Umuahia North Local Government Area of Abia State with the aid of research assistants. Although a total of two hundred copies of questionnaires were distributed, only 120 were filled and returned correctly. Data were analyzed using

frequencies, percentages and mean scores while standard deviation and Y-test were tested using statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) for windows version 1-5.

Table 1: Mean responses of the Fast Food Patronage Habit of the Families in Umuahia North L.G.A

S/NO	STATEMENTS		N	Mean	S.D	Range
1	Where foods are obtained mostly	Home	109	4.4	8.3	4.00
		Fast Restaurants	108	4.4	8.2	3.00
		Restaurants	77	3.2	1.3	4.00
		Supermarkets	77	2.9	1.4	4.00
		Others	56	3.2	1.2	4.00
2	Frequency of visit to fast food center per week	Daily	85	3.0	1.3	4.00
		More than 3 times/week	87	3.6	1.7	4.00
		Two times/week	79	3.2	1.2	4.00
		Once/per week	88	3.3	1.3	4.00
		Once per month	57	3.2	1.5	4.00
3	The duration of visit to fast food centers	Less than 6months	84	3.2	1.5	4.00
		Six months to/yr	75	3.5	1.3	4.00
		One to two yrs	75	2.7	1.4	4.00
		More than two yrs	82	3.5	1.3	4.00
		4	The meals taken daily at fast food centres	Break fast	63	3.1
Lunch	79			3.8	1.7	4.00
Dinner	72			3.0	1.4	4.00
In-between meal	101			4.1	1.1	5.00
Snacks	91			4.0	1.2	4.00

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5	The person you go to fast food centres with	alone	75	4.0	1.1	4.00
		wife/husband only	95	3.8	1.1	4.00
		children only	95	3.7	1.1	4.00
		the whole family	101	3.7	1.1	4.00
		friends only	105	3.9	1.4	4.00
		family and friends	95	3.3	1.4	4.00
6	What determines how frequently you visit fast food centres	Friends	93	3.1	1.6	4.00
		Economic level/Income	94	3.9	1.2	4.00
		Craving for food	98	3.7	1.3	4.00
		The nature of job you do	94	3.8	2.0	3.00
		Advertisement	100	3.5	1.2	4.00
		Their job	100	3.7	1.2	4.00
		Children's pressure	98	3.7	1.3	4.00
7	The person in the family that determines visits to fast food centres	Wife	105	3.5	1.4	4.00
		Husband	99	3.6	1.3	4.00
		Children	108	3.5	1.4	4.00
8	The factors that encourage visit to fast food centres	Give me time off work	102	3.6	1.3	4.00
		Food are more delicious/nutritious	100	3.5	1.4	4.00
		Food are more cheaper than cooking at home	99	2.9	1.3	4.00
		Wife/husband always want to	104	3.3	1.3	4.00
		My friends always want to	103	3.5	1.2	4.00
		Always have my business appointment there	99	3.3	1.3	4.00
		It is the only place for recreation in the	108	3.8	1.2	4.00

		town				
		My children always want to	101	3.5	1.4	4.00
9	The limits of going to fast food centres	Do not have time	109	3.8	1.3	4.00
		Do not have enough money	108	3.5	1.4	4.00
		My religion forbids it	103	3.1	1.5	4.00
		My culture forbids it	103	2.4	1.3	4.00
		My wife does not like it	100	2.5	1.2	4.00
		My children do not like it	101	2.8	1.4	4.00
		My husband does not like it	68	2.8	1.3	4.00

Source: Data from Field Survey, 2011

Table 1 revealed that the families studied agreed that they obtain their meals at home (mean = 4.4) and at fast food centres (Mean = 4.4), but disagreed to obtaining heir food from supermarkets (Mean = 2.94). It was observed that the respondents were undecided (Mean = 3.0) about how frequent they visit fast food centre per week but agreed that they visit fast food mre than 3 times per week (mean = 3.6).

This agrees with a report by Frank (2010) that the daily restaurants have the highest flow of customers within the working days with all age groups patronizing them. This table further revealed that a great number of families were buying snacks on daily basis from the fast food centers, which forms a major food habit for them. Lucas and Ogata (2005) had reported that snacks contribute significantly to the total days' nutrient intake and the group snacks time may encourage families to try a new food. However, this table revealed that children influence the intake of fast foods hence they prefer taking their meals and encourages their parents to patronize the fast food centers.

Table 1 reveals that fast foods are highly acceptable in the families where the members of the families patronize it. The respondents has high

acceptability (through the mean of 3.5 and above) ongoing alone, as a member of the family, going with wife and husband only, going with children and going with the entire family the acceptability of the respondent indicates that fast food has a relative patronage from the families. It also reveals that respondents patronize the fast food centers as a result of time factor since it gives them time off work. This is in line with Frank (2010) who opined that people are too busy to pay attention to their homes, have too much work to do and too much things to be done in their spare time, this is why they usually do not have time to think of what they eat, so they rely much on fast foods.

Table 2: Mean responses of the Frequency of Intake of Foods in Fast Food Centers per Week by families in Umuahia North L.G.A.

Meals	Daily		Less than 3 times		Less than 2 times		Once		Do not eat		Total		No response		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Fried Rice	24	2.0	14	11.7	18	15.0	2	20.5	20	16.7	10	84.1	19	15.2	120	100
Jell of Rice	6	5.0	24	20.0	10	8.3	2	22.7	23	19.2	90	75.0	30	25.0	120	100
Coconut rice	12	10.0	15	12.5	17	14.2	2	19.3	28	23.3	95	79.2	25	20.8	120	100
Beans only	9	7.5	14	11.7	12	10.0	1	9.2	41	34.2	87	72.5	33	27.5	120	100
Rice+Beans	10	8.3	16	13.3	19	15.8	1	11.4	39	32.5	88	73.3	32	26.7	120	100
Garri+Soup	11	9.2	20	16.7	17	14.2	1	10.2	31	25.8	91	75.8	29	24.2	120	100
Semovita+soup	6	5.0	24	20.0	12	10.0	1	10.3	32	26.7	87	72.5	33	27.5	120	100
Spaghetti	18	15.0	13	10.8	18	15.0	1	10.3	24	20.0	86	71.7	34	28.3	120	100
Yam+stew	21	17.5	20	16.7	11	9.2	1	9.2	22	18.3	85	70.8	35	29.2	120	100
Bread Fruit	15	12.5	23	19.2	13	10.8	1	15.8	19	15.8	88	70.3	32	26.7	120	100
Moi-Moi	21	17.5	26	21.7	13	10.8	1	13.6	15	12.5	91	75.8	29	24.2	120	100
Meat pie	26	21.7	35	29.2	23	19.2	9	7.5	14	11.7	10	8.3	13	10.8	120	100
Chicken Pie	28	23.3	20	16.7	9	7.5	2	18.3	13	10.8	92	76.7	28	23.3	120	100
Burger	13	10.8	27	22.5	17	14.2	2	16.7	15	12.5	9	7.5	28	23.3	120	100

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Cake	12	10	16	13	21	17.	2	17.	17	14	8	72.	33	27.	120	100
		.0		.3		5	1	5		.2	7	5		5		
Ice Cream	19	15	20	16	15	12.	2	20.	13	20	9	75.	29	24.	120	100
		.8		.7		5	4	0		.8	1	8		2		
Shawarma	32	26	17	14	15	12.	2	16.	17	37	1	84.	19	15.	120	100
		.7		.2		5	0	7		.5	0	2		8		
											1					
Soft Drink	31	25	17	14	19	15.	1	9.2	25	20	1	85.	17	14.	120	100
		.8		.2		8	1			.8	0	8		2		
											3					
Beer	13	10	10	8.	6	5.0	9	7.5	45	40	8	69.	37	30.	120	100
		.8		3						.0	5	2		8		
Juice	23	19	18	15	14	11.	1	12.	25	20	9	79.	25	20.	120	100
		.2		.0		7	5	5		.8	5	2		8		
Alcohol	7	5.	5	4.	6	5.0	1	11.	48	40	8	66.	40	33.	120	100
		8		2			4	7		.0	0	7		3		

Table 2 shows the foods that were consumed by most respondents studied. The result revealed that 89% of meat pie is consumed frequently per week, while 84.2% of fried rice and 84.2 %of shawarma is consumed frequently at these fast food centers. Eighty five percent (85%) of soft drink per week, 69.2 of beer per week, and 79.2 of juice were consumed. This table revealed that there is high frequency of food intake per week in the fast food centers as stated in the table.

Table 3: Mean responses of Changes in Family Lifestyle of Respondents Eating at Fast Food Centers.

		N	MEAN	S.D.	RANGE
The changes observed in your wife/husband since your frequency to fast food	More attached with wife/husband	102	3.1 ±	1.4	4.00
	Spend more time with my wife/husband	97	2.9 ±	1.4	4.00
	My wife/husband is getting fatter	105	3.4 ±	1.4	4.00
	Argues/quarrel	103	3.0 ±	1.4	4.00
	My wife/husband cooks better at home	100	3.6 ±	1.4	4.00
	Wife/husband refuse to eat at home	93	2.5 ±	1.5	4.00
	Wife/husband refuses to eat traditional food	109	3.0 ±	1.4	4.00
	Wife/husband comes back earlier	94	3.3 ±	1.4	4.00
	Any other	69	2.6 ±	1.5	4.00
	The changes observed in children since frequency to fast food center.	My children look fatter now	96	3.0 ±	1.4
The children are becoming lazier and unable work		104	3.0 ±	1.4	4.00
My children are happier now.		95	3.0 ±	1.5	4.00
Argument/quarrel often		108	2.5 ±	1.3	4.00
The children have started being independent		108	2.6 ±	1.3	4.00
Children eat better/nutritious food		110	3.3 ±	1.3	4.00

Table 3 above shows that they all have a cutoff point of 3.5 and above of the respondents intake. The table further indicates the acceptability of 1st 6 items , that wife and husband still cook better at home as one of the changes in their family lifestyle this research support Anozie and Anyakaoha (2010) reported that although majority of food is bought and eaten at home and outside, some homes still make their meals. In the

research work the respondent in 3 also reported and accepted strongly that the family is more attached as a result of eating their meals at fast food centers. It is observed through the respondents that families now go to fast food centers for recreation often and there is a significant increase of visit to fast food centers as a result of recreation activities.

Furthermore, the table showed that family expenses was greatly increased, the acceptability of the family expenses being increased is as a result of change in eating style and is in line with the observation of Anozie *et al.*, (2010), that over indulgence in such habits are a waste of money and waste of time. On the issue of Family being more sociable, the respondents accepted that this is in relationship with the words of Frank (2010) that some families, sees going to fast food centers as an opportunity to show off their wealth and lavish their standard of living.

Discussions of Findings

Results from table 1 revealed that patronage of the fast food by families are as a result of lack of time for meal preparation, the nature of work they do, this supports the word of Frank (2010) that people are too busy to pay attention to their homes, they have too much work to do, and too many things to be done in their spare time, that is why, they usually do not have time to think of what they eat, thereby resting on fast food. This table also revealed that the respondents have high rate of accepting fast food.

Table 2- Reveals the frequency of intake of foods in the fast food centers per week. Result revealed that there is high frequency of food intake in fast food centers per week such as snacks and likes which has greater percentage.

Table 3: This table reveals the changes in family lifestyle of the respondents eating at fast food centers. From the report, respondents indicated acceptability of some fast foods that influenced their change in their life style. Also, it reveals changes in the family economy, which indicates that the cost of feeding at fast food centers is relatively high. More junk food consumed and the children do not learn most of the food preparation, chores at times because parents do not prepare them again.

The table revealed that fast food centers is one of the recreation centers in Umuahia North Local Government Area of Abia State that parents patronize a lot. Above all, the respondents accepted that husband and wife cooks better at home when they want. The result revealed that a high proportion of respondents go to fast food centers with their families most of the time. This is in agreement with Joshi (2010), who observed that many people in the urban areas visit and prefer fast foods because, it is a relatively low-cost food purchased at an outlet which gives service and is convenient. Her findings also agree with this study because she also observed further that a fast food can never replace a good wholesome home meal no matter the frequency of the visit.

In another development, Seith (2008), in agreement with the finding stated that a visit to the nearest fast food centre is a family's outing enjoyed by all, because the products offered by the fast food centers caters for the tastes of young and old alike. Also from this table the family ties are not destroyed, the respondents state that families are more attached because they carry the whole family members to the center to eat and buy take away foods for those who could not go with them. In line with the finding, Cullen and Baranowiski (2000) stated that family meal table plays a vital part in rearing children. They observed that during time for meals, the whole family normally come together, children learn moral values, absorb family culture and develop as individuals and this knits the family together. In conclusion, it was observed from this study that the more the patronage (per week and in number of years), the more attached, and sociable the family is.

Conclusion

This study has revealed the significant increase in the patronage of fast foods, indicating general acceptability of fast foods in the families and some negative effects especially on the economy of the family which makes the families to over spend on family meals. However, these findings indicates that most people who patronize fast food are mainly civil servants and business men who eat from fast food centre as a result of time, and nature of their work while greater percentage visits fast food

for social life and recreation. However, eating habits have shifted dramatically from home made meals to fast foods.

Recommendations

1. The Ministry of Women Affairs and other Women Organization should organize seminars, talks, workshops for families especially women and educate them generally on the importance of eating homemade meals and other traditional foods.
2. It is important to solve the problem of not eating at home by counselors both in the church and society at large.
3. Policies that improve food securities should be made.
4. Families should not depend on fast food only because it may help to increase their body mass thereby causing obesity.
5. Fast food is not only bad for your body it eats up your bank account, reduce fast food intake today.
6. Families should prepare and eat meals at home together because mealtime is a perfect time to show the family that they are your priority.

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