



Dietary Patterns and Acculturation Among Latinos of Mexican Descent

Eunice Romero-Gwynn and Douglas Gwynn

Research Report No. 23

October 1997

ABSTRACT

The diet of Latinos living in the United States is influenced by the dietary traditions of individual countries, availability of native foods in U.S. food stores, new dietary practices adopted in the U.S., as well as length of residency of in the U.S. This paper describes dietary patterns and selected health conditions among people of Mexican descent in California. Sources of information include literature searches and data from a study conducted among women of Mexican descent living in five California counties. The study investigated the degree of retention and/or abandonment of traditional Mexican dietary practices and adoption of new ones in the U.S. Participants included 165 Mexican-born women who had migrated as adults to the U.S. A second group consisted of 101 first-generation Mexican-American women born and reared in the U.S. Women in this study were low-income, with an average age of 34 years, and an average education of seven years. Frequency of food consumption before and after immigration, and frequency of food consumption among Mexican-Americans were assessed. Over 160 traditional Mexican foods and foods of the “typical” U.S. diet were included in the research instrument. Prevalence of obesity and diabetes as well as participants’ awareness of preventive measures were assessed. The study identified different levels of dietary acculturation among the two groups. These reflect a decline in the consumption of traditional foods, new ways of utilizing traditional foods and, above all, the adoption of new foods. Overall, there were some healthful and some significantly less healthful dietary changes.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Eunice Romero-Gwynn is Associate Clinical Professor in the Division of International Health and Cross-Cultural Medicine in School of Medicine at the University of California, San Diego. She has conducted research and taught nutrition in several Latin American countries and in the United States. Her main area of interest is the nutrition and food patterns of Latinos and other immigrant groups in the United States.

Douglas Gwynn is a Research Sociologist at MEDGO International. He is the former Director and founder of the California Center for Applied Research (CCAR) and has worked as a lecturer and professor. His research interests include rural water resources, health, and nutritional status of immigrants.