Vegetable diversity reduced in times of COVID-19 - first findings from a global civil science project (#161)

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The crisis related to the COVID-19 pandemic influenced nutrition security through various pathways. This ranged from short-term to long-term impacts, not only on health but also on food systems.

The "Food systems in times of COVID19" project aimed to identify how the observed constraints affect the food systems and dietary behaviour of populations across the globe. Here, special attention was paid to the consumption of vegetables and legumes.

An online survey on Food and COVID-19 was conducted using a semi-structured questionnaire translated into several languages. Regression models were calculated to evaluate changes in consumption patterns and to test potential determinants for the changes. For information on reasons for changes open ended questions were analysed qualitatively.

Time spend at home, working from home, and mental stress were important drivers for changes in dietary intake according to the 1042 respondents included in this analysis. The participants observed a change in food quantity (38%) and vegetable intake (27%). No changes were observed for the number of vegetable groups consumed, while significant reductions in diversity were detected within all vegetable groups. Associations between the number of consumed vegetable types during the COVID-19 pandemic and income regions as well as gender were observed. The regression analysis showed that the level of decrease in vegetable diversity in the different vegetable groups were depending on educational and occupational status, gender and household environment. Changes in food prices were related to changes in vegetable intake per se, overall vegetable diversity, and diversity within the vitamin A rich vegetable group.

Food systems are not static and are transitioning quickly as could be observed during the Covid-19 pandemic. There is a need for a nutrition strategy to strengthen the resilience of vulnerable households to consume a diverse diet in adequate amount even in times of a pandemic.

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