

Case Report

Evaluation of Obesity not Seen in Kars and in the Living Culture around Kars

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Abstract

This is part of a PhD study which has been carried out in Kars, one of the eastern provinces of Anatolia in Turkey. In the original study, some of the different groups living there, Azeris, Kurds, Terekemes, the Alevis called Turkmen in this region and Sunni Muslims Yerlis were interviewed. These are separated from each other due to their religious beliefs and called as different **groups** in this study. This is an anthropological research that is conducted to understand social structure of the region and understand the culture of constantly changing, conflicts and common food habits, lifestyles, preferences, and their interrelation of groups. It is the study that is implemented participant observation method and constituted with the evaluation of the compiled code of ethics according to information gathered through in-depth interviews. During this study an unexpected situation has been discovered and it has noticed that obesity problem is not experienced in this city. When the information that people, from each group, said were collected and evaluated number of results were found. Their efforts for protecting their culture, for holding the family together, attempting to protect the table layout, the lack of eating outside habit and most importantly the lack of fast food restaurants in the city have been identified as the reasons for not finding obesity.

Keywords: Food; Obesity; Ethnic

Introduction

Kars is a province located in the east of Turkey, on the border of Armenia, without a border door, a province that is snowy for eight months. Here due to severe climatic conditions, mountainous geography and political sensitivities, economic conditions are not very good. It is not possible to understand or assess the situation remotely. During an anthropological study conducted to understand the eating habits of the city, it has been found that there is no obesity. As a result of excessive food consumption and experienced media and rapidly evolving industry, we can see obesity is increasing both in

the World and in Turkey when data from the World Health Organization is analyzed. In 2014, 13% of adults aged 18 and over in the world were obese that is BMI (Body Mass Index) ≥ 30 . The prevalence in Turkey is given as 22.9 % (Web-1). Eating has nice features, although it is a fear for the whole world in the case of uncontrolled consumption.

According to Levi-Strauss, the founder of the French structuralism, eating and cuisine, thinking of them is even beautiful, refers to the basic attitude of people, the meaning is coded and it is necessary to the to influence the deeper structure of community in order to decipher this code [1]. Mutual

contribution relationship between food habits and culture is an undeniable fact. Eating habits, shaped by culture, sharing the meal contribute to family unity by bringing together family during meals and contribute to develop social ties. Jointly prepared meals would be strengthen group solidarity and effective in protecting the culture. The diet, transmitted from generation to generation, cooking methods and food choices are also transmitted through generations. Of course due to cultural diffusion changes or habits that discontinued / cannot be continued are possible.

According to Krögel, food is a very significant means of transmission in order to form and to strengthen the identity of the group and each of the symbols about food in oral communication is a strong symbolic focus for the transmission and strength of identity [2]. Many studies and researches in the literature state that the magical power of food and the table integrate the community and by being continuous and variable and sharing it's important for the development of social ties, strengthening of group solidarity and protecting the family unity.

The concept of ethnicity is handled with different approaches in each country. In some racial ethnic identity stands out in some countries, but in some countries religion or language is considered as highlighting elements of ethnicity [3]. Each group has a sense of their own unique identity because of a sense that they have a common history they do not share with other groups [4].

In the social hierarchy within the group of people in the community taste is an important source for finding their own class, so that taste can be considered as class determining [5]. It is therefore necessary not to negate the place and the importance of food in culture. According to a study conducted by Devine; one of the many reasons that affect the food choices of people is their ethnicity. In this study conducted between 86 adults from different ethnic identities in the United States (Latin, Blacks, White), in-depth interviews with participants and ethnic identity was carried out, talked about food preferences and factors affecting food consumption. As a result of the analysis of the factors affecting the common food choices in different ethnic groups, it has been concluded that ideals, identities and their interaction with one another affect eating choices. Depending on being included the ethnic group, the ideals and identities are different. The changes in this differentiation in individual food choices are becoming the most prominent during individual transition period and the period that they are in contradiction with the group [6].

Goody working on bureaucracy, social structure and social changes, urbanization, considers that while making an assessment, social relations and individual differences should not be overlooked. According to him, culture is very important but the economics should not be ignored in studies of food and eating.

Both at the micro level that is in the house as well as at the macro level that states need to give importance to the economy [7].

According to Douglas working on culture, symbols, and rituals, despite a variety of technological changes, people all over the world are quite conservative about the eating habits of daily basis [8]. Technological developments affecting science and society can be said to lose their effect on food choices made by people. Another study supports the results obtained in this opinion made by Sutton in Kalymnos, one of the Greek islands. The food prepared for special days, the rituals and celebrations, is expected to leave traces in the memory, in contrast the ordinary daily meals are kept in the memory. When the concept of memory related to food has been thought, the examples about mourning, happiness, experience, the taste and smell are known. Thanks to Sutton's work, it is described there is not only smell and taste related to food in the memory, but also eating is a social behavior; food has a history, especially during international migration, culture transcended borders through food [9].

Also Cohen in a manner of supporting Douglas told that when people stopped at the border, they encounter with another culture or they realize that there are other ways of doing things or just when faced with a number of contrasts in their culture, they are aware of their own culture [10]. Bergman also, as told in the book in which he described cultural diffusion, says that the confrontation with other cultures makes people being aware of their culture. According to him, cultural diffusion is the spreading of the birthplace of elements such as clothing, food, language, and music to other cultures. Diffusion are sometimes achieved despite the political boundaries, hostility or competition apart from the physical barriers such as oceans or the mountains located between two cultures [11].

Sharing the food is also important to develop social ties, strengthen group solidarity and protect the unity of the family. Carsten examining the relationship created through sharing the same house, and shared meals in the immigrants has determined that the cause of the non-existent relationship before is to share the food with the welcoming attitude. Especially women and places are very important in adapting the new participants to local communities [12]. Delaney who has a sense that sharing food is a kind of borrowing, conducted a village ethnographical field research in Turkey. Focusing on food and social bonds, he has been stated that food has complex meanings and he has tried to solve it. According to him, borrowed the food from someone, you cannot reject the requested from you; you're owed to the one that feeds you [13].

The information passed to us through the culture is that allows us to decide what we eat, how to eat and when. Bourdieu, conducted a study to determine the preferences and tastes of the French clothing, furniture, leisure activities, and the dishes

on the menu will be served to invited guests. In the survey, he said they made their choices in a social bourgeois. Things that is chosen are not actually preferred. He has determined that they made their choices in contrast to the things that the lower classes preferred. But, it is interesting that he has not made a clear determination on taste and flavor. In this study, Bourdieu defines *habitus* as structures have been prepared in advance of formed structures and accordingly *habitus* is an unconscious or an irreversible act, creates conditions for the existence conditionings. *Habitus*, a product of the past depending on the resources in the past, produces the individual or group applications. Against events, individuals or groups are deciding suddenly to determine direction and this obstacle to self-improvement and causing protection of the existing location. *Habitus* can be described as embodied culture sets the limits of thought and action. Sociology interprets this situation that emerged unconsciously or unintentionally, and spontaneously, as individuals of the same objective conditions have the same *habitus* [14].

In the study of Ohnuki-Tierney on the meat and the America's symbol, McDonald's in entering Japan as a result of globalization, describing the situation becomes inevitable due to globalization says that confidential competitive between Japanese identity and global power represented with rice and meat and this situation is defined with the combination of the words the *global* (global) and *local* (local) as "glocalization" and this definition are used in Turkish as "küreyelleşme". In the same work, Ohnuki-Tierney says that food is still an incredibly powerful symbol, translating allusion to the metaphor in the individual and social sense, this symbol has the capacity to tell our land and our history. According to him, the diffusion would happen, but everyone retains its own identity and these counter powers continue to feed each other because the idea of self will not be meaningful without the other [15].

Eating habits are important criteria emphasizing the differences in cultures. According to Güvenç, culturing which is an important concept to pass the ethnocentrism that means to take the self to the center, to emphasize the importance of the self in relation of a group with the community, with other groups, are conscious and unconscious conditioning that mankind as children or adults are to take effect in their culture and experience during the training period. One of the examples he has given to explain this is African Dahomay family tables. In this table, the children sit together with their parents and learn to eat the mouse. This eating habits that may seem impossible to another culture is a culturing work carried out by the family in Dahomay [16].

Materials and Method

In this study, in-depth interviews and participant observation methods were used. In order to understand the selected daily lives of these groups in the region information about their food

was collected about what they eat, how they eat by detailing their eating habits of different people and families from different groups without prompting the differences with other groups. In addition to participant observation, in-depth interviews were conducted with 15 people, at least one from each group. The age of the people interviewed during the study, reputation in the community, hierarchy, are the criteria used in the selection of the interviewer. Age is an important measure because, it is important to be able to compare the experience of both old days and these days. Therefore, the age range is 40-80 years of age is considered to be appropriate. The respect in the family, having a high level in the hierarchy to get information about each generation was important for not censored. Their views on food culture, their adherence to the culture and obesity were recorded.

In this study, where participant observation method were used, and collected data were evaluated by combining. During the evaluations, *Code of Ethics of the American Anthropological Association (2009)* was the basis of the evaluation. Privacy rights of participants are protected with the responsibility taken in accordance with the rules set forth herein. The study was not approved by ethical committee in the institution but the study was supervised by a committee consisting of academicians every 6 months. In this study, the anthropology theorists working since the beginning of 1900 are used as main sources

The data obtained from the emphasis on the principle of respect for life or forcing by notifying the interviewees about all the details advance, evaluated and interpreted with scientific methods and results have been omitted without distortion. Data that is not obtained is not used, no changes to the registry to give a different result, the interviewers said are deciphered word by word as recorded, not considered to be true or false. Other people's ideas, methods, data, text are not used without having to refer as an ordinary condition of ethics and while using a previously published study source has been referred in accordance with the rules of scientific publications.

At the end of the study, the facts about the ethnic identities, cultures, life styles and their perceptions about the other groups of people live in Kars as Azeris, Terekemes, Kurds, Turkmens and Yerlis, are stated in order to showing the common points between them without causing a discrimination.

Results and Discussion

Many studies and researches in the literature show that the magical power of the food and table is important to protect the integrity of the community, this power is continuous and variable, sharing them develop social ties, strengthen group solidarity and family unity. According to Krögel, the formation of the identity of the group and to strengthen, food is a very significant means of transmission and is a strong symbolic focus in order to transmission of identification of the symbols

of food in oral expressions [2]. Groups in this region use food culture as a tool to protect their identity. According to the obtained data; people prepare and consume almost all of the food mentioned in interviews in their kitchen. So it can be said prepared and consumed meals are common. Their differences, and conflicts between groups are mentioned sometimes with a spice that are common to all tables, sometimes adding a piece of dough or some cheese. While Terekemes prepare and consume filled flaky pastry (kete) which is very common, as dessert, Yerlis and Azeris consume it with salt. Unlike others, Terekemes make pudding salty. While giving the recipes, they choose the food predominantly eaten, but they use sentences as like “we’ll do better than them” or “they put less salt” expressing that their food is tastier than the others.

When looking at the food habits that have been shaped by the culture in this region where a combination of many different cultures, people think sharing food improves the social ties. It is said family meals eaten together in the table contribute to family unity and bringing people together. As jointly prepared meals strengthen solidarity groups known to be effective in protecting the culture, these findings may also be found as true.

The following is one of the interesting and revealing interviews:

-Obesity is a major problem in the world. I do not see so many overweight people here.

-No, for example while chatting with a friend, I say “lets go to our home and let me prepare a soup”. None of us want to eat a hamburger or drink cola here, none of us have the fast food habit. Here our’s habit is of slops and dishes prepared by mother.

-But you eat pastries and pies, right?

-Of course, but ultimately less harmful than a hamburger. So here there is not a fast food culture.

-There are fast food restaurants, aren’t there?

-No not at all.

-If there, do not go?

-I do not know, for example there is a pizzeria but only university students are going necessarily since it is cheap. Even there is not toast and hamburger in the canteen of our school. The wife prepares pies, bagels and pastries and her husband sells. So there is not obesity since the lack of fast food habits.

The diet transmitted from generation to generation, cooking methods and food choices could be transferred to a newly grown youth here. Of course due to cultural diffusion, there had been changes or discontinued habits. Kashar cheese

which is unique to Kars is even rejected by the new generation of young children. Packaged cheese taken from the industrial market, presented in colorful packaging are preferred. It looks like a symbol of the human being of the world.

Although there is a population of young people in the city because of the university, established in 1992, lack of fast food restaurants seems to be an important feature. However, in interviews the situation referred to as follows: The students come to the university are adjusting to the city from economically and culturally because they often come from neighboring cities and they are from the children of low-income families. They eat their meals in dormitories or they cook themselves. The young people in Kars go to their homes after school as there is not many places to enjoy. Almost all of the interviewers and the young people in the city think that the food cooked at their homes are much cleaner and healthier. They say they are not “incompetent” like their peers living in big cities and they enjoy cooking together and a soup cooked at home is more intimate in terms of social relations, they think to sit and chatting at home is more real. None of them have an insistence or longing for the opening of the fast food restaurants in their city, Kars.

Kars is a province which is snowy most of the year. Climatic conditions are severe, geographically mountainous region, political sensitivities and economic conditions are not very good. The culture and food habits in Kars are very special because of these conditions. These challenges of living conditions and the distance to metropolitan cities make life standards different and special.

Conclusion

There are many factors that should be considered for obese people to improve their eating habits. It is needed to know the meaning of foods for obese people, ecological, historical and socio-cultural factors affecting their eating habits. In order to assess these factors, it is necessary to have vision that enables interdisciplinary connections and their integrations. Combination of the studies in social and health areas with an interdisciplinary approach may solve obesity problem which is the vital problem of the world.

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