



FOOD, FRIENDS, AND FAMILY: ALTERED EATING TRADITIONS DURING COVID

Ian Hannah

Abstract

COVID 19 has brought many changes in the process of its meteoric rise in prominence: Stores have closed because they aren't safe to enter, restaurants without takeout are flat out banned in some areas, and people have had to abandon some of their favorite food rituals, like a weekly fast-food lunch with friends from school. Given how the pandemic has affected our way of life and the culture around us, how dramatic are the changes to our eating habits at home? This poster examines some of the less obvious changes that have ensued from these unusual circumstances, focusing on one family, and examining eating habits and traditions prior to and following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Objective

To say that Covid has been an utter disaster area for us all to deal with is an understatement. And while we have a good idea of what it does to a good number of people from a food perspective, considering the increased need for food banks to the point of mile long lines, the more subtle effects like an impact on traditions and dietary choices. Thus, the point of this is to examine how Covid has impacted families in ways beyond simple food scarcity. It should be noted that the primary provider of the family interviewed is an essential worker, so the effects won't be as drastic as for "typical" families.

Methods

In order to determine the overall effect of Covid, the method used was a survey/interview hybrid: A list of questions filled out at two different occasions with my family: The first was done in a similar style to a survey where they filled out the questions on their own while the second was a group interview I had with the whole family where we discussed both the questions and any conclusions come to with it. After doing so, I tabulated the results and subjected them to both qualitative and quantitative analysis where applicable to determine trends and any differences.

Conclusions

It didn't take much effort to determine Covid had some kind of effect on this, but it took more to figure out what: When people are upset, we tend to default to things that make us happy. And that effect tends to be much higher when dealing with a pandemic that has killed hundreds of thousands of people in just one country. Thus, it is quite likely that while my family hasn't been affected in the same way as others due to my father's essential worker status, like needing to ration food or not celebrating with restaurants or family gatherings, the effect of the constant threat of death looming over us like the sword of Damocles has encouraged us to indulge to take the worst of the edge off.

Eastern Illinois University

Results

At first blush, my family's dietary habits weren't immensely changed by Covid: I am not ashamed to admit that while rarely going to restaurants, we had fast food an average of two to three times a week for dinner as a family and desert was less a treat for some of us but the meal following dinner. The most significant changes were with myself as I'm the only one going to college and the lockdown threw me from dorm living to home living where any differences I had in diet from my family promptly ceased to exist. That being said, the most standout change I noticed was related to our poorer dietary habits: We agreed that we averaged around 2-3 incidents of eating take out a week for any of us, but that increased to between 4-5 every week, with our tendency of both getting desert items when grocery shopping and eating them increasing. Despite the fact that our budget or means hadn't changed significantly, our eating habits have become worse



Potential ways to build off this:

Two main confounds come to mind: First, two members of my family have gone on a medically supervised diet due to our health, so that has likely had a ripple effect that bled into the results at some point. The second is that my father's essential worker status means that we haven't been as seriously affected by the pandemic on a food scarcity standpoint. Any studies building off this topic would likely need to either target non-essential workers and people whose diets haven't suffered major changes like those two family members.