ETHNO-SOCIOLOGY OF CASSAVA PROCESSING PRACTICES, QUALITY AND SAFETY AMONG THE LUGUBARA OF TEREGO DISTRICT, NORTH-WESTERN UGANDA

Apil Jennifer

ABSTRACT

Despite efforts to promote recommended cassava processing practices for quality and safety in Uganda, their uptake remains low. Previous studies have attributed the limited uptake primarily to institutional and economic factors, often overlooking the critical socio-cultural context in which cassava processing and consumption occur. This study examined the ethno-sociology of cassava processing, quality, and safety among the Lugbara ethnicities in Terego district, northwestern Uganda. Specifically, the study: (i) analyzed cassava processing practices, cultural facets and how they differ from scientifically recommended processing practices; (ii) assessed consumer preferences and willingness to pay for flour attributes; and (iii) assessed cassava cyanide poisoning knowledge, perceived threat, and uptake of preventive measures. A focused ethnographic design was employed, incorporating various data collecting methods including focus group discussions, participant observations, in-depth interviews, key informant interviews, and a household survey administered to 420 participants. Qualitative data was subjected to thematic content analysis. Quantitative data on the other side was subjected to mixed logit model and moderated mediation analysis was run with model 58 of Hayes' PROCESS macro for SPSS. Findings indicate convergence between traditional and scientifically recommended processing practices at cassava drying, milling, and storage. Divergence was observed at cassava harvesting, peeling, washing, chipping, and fermenting. Consumer preference and willingness to pay was shaped by non-color attributes including sweet taste, Odorless, fine texture, and high swelling capacity imbued with figurative meanings drawn from socio-cultural perspectives. On cyanide poisoning, knowledge ($\beta = 0.24$, $p = 0.000 < 0.05$), perceived severity ($\beta = 0.413$, $p = 0.000 < 0.05$) and perceived susceptibility ($\beta = 0.502$, $p = 0.000 < 0.05$) had a positive and significant influence on uptake of preventive measures. The socio-cultural dimensions highlight the importance of viewing cassava processing within the framework of socially constructed meanings, rather than solely as a technical food quality and safety issue. Therefore, promoting recommended cassava-processing practices requires a sound communication strategy to address the myths and perceptions on quality and safety embedded in traditional processing.