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Nutritional behaviour as a complex phenomenon: Identification of starting points for modifying food consumption

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As nutritional behaviour is a complex phenomenon, starting points for successful modification must be deduced from a systems perspective.

A cause-effect model was developed by identifying factors directly or indirectly influencing the core factor food consumption and causal relationships between all factors on basis of current literature and expert consultation. The relationships were specified by strength (weak, medium, strong) and type (promoting, restricting). For model development and subsequent analyses, elements of three instruments were combined: Nutrition-ecological Modelling (NutriMod, Schneider and Hoffmann 2011), further developed to NutriMod+ST (Hummel and Hoffmann 2016); Sensitivity Model (Vester 2007); Cross-Impact Balance Analysis (Weimer-Jehle 2013).

The model consists of nineteen factors, each aggregating several aspects of nutritional behaviour. Mainly four of these were identified as promising starting points to modify food consumption: family as agent of socialization, socio-economic status, social identity, and psychological resources. Additional analytical results show that it is not sufficient to consider one isolated factor. Instead, the relevant factors need to be considered in parallel (Hummel 2017).

Based on these results, more targeted measures can be planned which prioritize and combine the identified starting points. The complexity of nutritional behaviour is considered and dealt with to be more successful in modifying food consumption.

References:

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