



ABSTRACT

Eating is a practice: The need of social science within nutrition

Prof. Dr. Lotte Holm, Department of Food and Resource Economics, University of Copenhagen, Denmark

Eating is, from a nutritional perspective, a matter of which food is on the plate, which nutrients are ingested, and how they impact on bodily health and wellbeing. From a social science perspective eating can be seen as a practice, a routinized type of behavior, which takes place enmeshed in the flow of activities, relations and events, which make up daily life. While the science of nutrition lays the fundament for recommendations and guidelines for how and what people should eat, the contribution from social science to nutrition is about how people eat, why they eat the way they do, and how eating habits change.

I will present some examples of multi-disciplinary research within nutrition, which show how social science can help address questions and problems that are central within the area of nutrition and health. Three themes will be addressed: promoting healthy eating habits in populations; improving institutional feeding, and combating the obesity epidemic.

- How do dietary guidelines for healthy eating fit with ordinary people's ideas and practices about health and healthy eating? How do people experience eating different types of healthy diets? These are questions which are addressed in a series of in-depth studies of daily life around food in households, and, more specifically in studies of how new dietary regimes are received by men and women, who participate in large controlled intervention studies which test health effects of various dietary principles. Social scientific studies uncover social, cultural and practical obstacles and promotional factors for adopting and sustaining healthy diets in daily life.
- Many people who depend on institutional feeding programs are undernourished. How can this be addressed? While more nutritious meals and higher quality of food are

central, social science research shows that the social status of food and meals in institutions help increasing food intake of the institutionalized individuals.

- Growing rates of obesity raise questions as to the causes, consequences and potential cures of the so-called obesity epidemic. Social science research contributes to these questions by uncovering social and cultural aspects of appetite, the day to day managing of bodyweight among ordinary people, the understanding, experience of and handling of overweight and obesity in different population groups and public opinions about obesity and how the obese should be treated.

Healthy nutrition is the outcome about what people do. If guidelines and recommendations for healthy eating are to be welcomed and seen as relevant and valuable support for ordinary peoples' striving for a better life, they need to build on knowledge of peoples' practices in relation to food and eating. The need to combine nutritional and other health sciences with social science is therefore now widely acknowledged on research agendas in EU and in several European countries.

Prof. Dr. Lotte Holm
University of Copenhagen
Department of Food and Resource Economics
Consumption, bioethics and governance
Rolighedsvej 25
DK-1958 Frederiksberg C
E-Mail: loho@ifro.ku.dk