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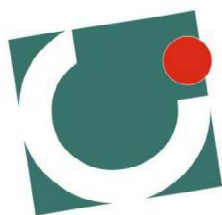
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INFLUENCE OF ENVIRONMENTAL AND POLITICAL DETERMINANTS ON FOOD CHOICES IN A SAMPLE OF PORTUGUESE POPULATION

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Abstract

Food choices are a complex system and are influenced by many factors, namely environmental, socioeconomic, biological cultural, political, cognitive and affective factors, as well as sensory perceptions (European Food Information Council, 2004; Monteleone et al., 2017; Sleddens et al., 2015). It is well known that current human natural resource usage exceeds the planetary limits (Aschemann-Witzel, 2015; Steffen et al., 2015). Hence, there is an increasing concern regarding the impacts of food choices on the environment, leading to a renewed interest in the concept of environmentally sustainable diets (Sautron et al., 2015; Seo et al., 2016). Furthermore, consumers are more concerned about the origin of the food products they consume, animal welfare, human's right and the environmental sustainability of their diets (Bazzani et al., 2017; Birch et al., 2018; Kjærnes, 2012; la Lama et al., 2017).

The aim of this study was to investigate the extent to which environmental and political determinants influence people's food choices in a sample of the Portuguese population. It was also analysed how some sociodemographic factors and special food regimens affected the environmental and political determinants underlying the participants' food choices.

This cross-sectional study was undertaken by means of a questionnaire on a non-probabilistic sample of 1314 participants. The data was collected among a sample of the Portuguese population and measured in what extension people's food choices were influenced by environmental and political determinants, on a scale ranging from -2 to +2, which could be interpreted as follows: [-2.0 ; -1.5[- food choices not at all influenced by environmental and political determinants; [-1.5 ; -0.5[- food choices not influenced by environmental and political determinants; [-0.5 ; 0.5[- food choices slightly influenced by environmental and political determinants; [0.5 ; 1.5[- food choices influenced

by environmental and political determinants; [1.5 ; 2.0] - food choices strongly influenced by environmental and political determinants.

From the sample at study, it was observed that, in general, the participants' food choices were influenced by environmental and political determinants (mean scores between 0.5 and 1.5). The exceptions were for the participants who lived in rural areas (0.48 ± 0.04), those who had a professional activity or studies related to nutrition (0.45 ± 0.11), the fruitarians (0.33 ± 0.48) and also the participants who followed other specific food regimens that were not mentioned in the questionnaire (0.49 ± 0.13). For these participants, their food choices were only slightly influenced by environmental and political determinants (mean values between -0.5 and 0.5).

The results of the parametric tests revealed that significant differences existed between age groups ($p = 0.001$), genders ($p = 0.047$), levels of education ($p = 0.000$), living environments ($p = 0.000$), professional status ($p = 0.000$) and also regarding the areas of work or studies ($p = 0.000$). There were also found significant differences between the participants who were responsible for buying their own food and the ones who were not ($p = 0.000$). However, there were no significant differences regarding the participants' food regimens ($p = 0.104$). Considering all the variables under study, the highest average scores were for the seniors (1.07 ± 0.05), men (0.81 ± 0.50), those who had a university degree (0.87 ± 0.02), the participants who lived in an urban area (0.86 ± 0.02), the retired (0.99 ± 0.06), the ones that were responsible for buying their own food (0.81 ± 0.51), the participants that had a professional activity or studies related to agriculture (0.85 ± 0.10) and also for the participants who followed a flexitarian dietary regimen (0.94 ± 0.13). Nonetheless, in none of the cases the participants' food choices were strongly influenced by environmental and political determinants (mean scores between 1.5 and 2.0).

Hence, this work allowed concluding that the sociodemographic factors influence people's concerns about the environmental and political impacts of their eating patterns. The results that were obtained in this study are very important to develop more efficient strategies that can increase people's awareness about this subject.

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