

Australian consumer concern about food waste and packaging: a cross-sectional survey about environmentally sustainable food choices.

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Healthy and sustainable diet patterns have been recommended for inclusion in dietary guideline development and associated dietary messaging,⁽¹⁾ which has already been adopted in some countries. Reducing food waste and limiting waste from over-packaged foods are two practices recommended in healthy and sustainable diet patterns. In Australia, household food waste contributes to an estimated 71% of food waste, which the National food waste strategy aims to halve by 2030.⁽²⁾ Household waste also contains a high prevalence of food packaging from heavily promoted ultra-processed food (UPF), with environmental costs incurred in their production⁽³⁾ and associations with poorer human health.⁽⁴⁾ There is little published data on the characteristics and level of concern for environmental factors when consumers make food choices. The objective of this study was to identify the characteristics of Australian adults concerned about household food waste and disposal of food packaging when making food choice decisions. Identifying these population groups may help uncover drivers of those decisions and inform public health interventions for a healthful and sustainable diet. The adult survey participants ($n = 540$, over 18 years) were recruited online by quota by age and gender from a survey panel in February 2022. Participants were 50% male, 19% aged 55–64 years, 33% in the healthy BMI range (18–24.9 m/kg²), 30% had a bachelor's degree or higher, 20% retired or homemakers and 22% in professional occupations. Participants were asked to indicate the level of concern when making food choices from “All of the time”, “Some of the time” or “None of the time”, to the two questions: (1) “Food packaging I need to dispose of” or (2) “Food waste generated in my household”. Participants demonstrated intentional food waste practice if they chose “A lot of the time” for either question. Descriptive, univariate and multivariate analysis was conducted in SPSS 26. Over one third (37%) of participants practiced intentional food waste decisions. In univariate analysis BMI ($p = 0.05$), education ($p < 0.001$) and occupation ($p = 0.032$) were associated with intentional food waste decisions. Using multivariate analysis, only education level remained significant when making food choices, with those educated to tertiary or trade level twice as likely to consider sustainable food waste practices compared to those educated to year 12 or below (OR = 2.12, 95% CI [1.427, 3.150]), controlling for age and gender. These results suggest that only a third of participants had a high level of concern about food waste and packaging when they made food decisions and were twice as likely to be more highly educated. The findings suggest there is a need for public health interventions to raise the awareness of and concern for the environmental implications of food choices.

References

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