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## Psychological Factors on Food Neophobia among the Young Culinarian in Malaysia: Novel food preferences

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### Abstract

This study examined the effects of psychological factors towards willingness to taste and cook novel foods among the young culinarians. Three hundred (300) students from culinary arts program in three culinary institutes in Malaysia participated in this study. Through self-administered survey questionnaires, the results revealed that most of the young culinarians are enthusiastic in preparing dishes that are novel to them. Nevertheless, the psychological factors negatively correlated with the willingness to taste and cook novel foods ( $r = -0.800$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Therefore, it is suggested that treatment involving a combination of desensitization exposure of foods may reduce these types of rejections.

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*Keywords:* Psychological factors; neophobia; young culinarian; Malaysia

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### 1. Introduction

Food neophobia lead to the tendency in consuming the same types of food over and again and contribute to the restriction of tasting other foods (Olabi, Najm, Baghdadi & Morton, 2009). Meanwhile, extensive available studies

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on food neophobia have been focusing on the children (Falciglia, Couch, Gribble, Pabst & Frank, 2000; Galloway, Lee & Birch, 2003). Using Health Eating Index, Falciglia et al. (2000) found that neophobic children are consuming less variety of food and had a higher intake of saturated fat. Galloway et al. (2003) states that 7-year-old girls with food neophobia consumed fewer vegetables and fewer preferences on the variety of food intake. Looking at the level of food neophobia towards the children with parent educational background, Mustonen, Oerlemans & Tuorila (2012) revealed that the children of well-educated parents had tasted a larger number of foods thus displaying lower behavioural neophobia compared to children with fewer educated parents.

On food neophobia among the young adults, Pliner & Hobden (1992) used the Food Neophobia Scale (FNS) by comparing the level of food neophobia between international college students of Lebanese and American. They found that the Lebanese students are higher in the FNS score in adapting the novel foods. The reason for the higher score is owing to their current diets and their culture that caused them reluctant to consume the novel foods (Rozin, 1997; Stallberg-White and Pliner, 1999). Choe & Cho (2012) revealed that Korean college students' FNS score were slightly higher than American due to the wellness and growing preferences for higher diet thus avoiding and rejecting the novel foods that they perceived to be high in salt and fat (Park, Park & Choi, 2008).

Despite this, there is still lack of studies at food neophobia among the young culinarians. Gisslen (2007) argued that to be knowledgeable and highly diversified in their skill, the young culinarians are required to learn, prepare and taste enormous types of foods. They are also trained to be the future sensory panels that clearly involved with sensory of taste in evaluating the novel foods product for new market entrance (McWilliams, 2010). In this sense, having food neophobia not only might limit young culinarians' food preferences, habits, exposure and knowledge of food but creativity or even career progression. Therefore, food neophobia among these individuals is considering as interesting issue to be investigated.

## **2. Literature review**

### *2.1. Psychological factors*

The psychological factors are often associated with human that is the consumer behavior; the individual's decision making in terms of purchasing of certain items and food choices. On the other hand, psychological factors are also related to individual mind and emotions. They are hard to describe, this is owing to the differences between one person to others, depending on their background and lifestyles. Notably, some psychological factors such as beliefs, habits, values and past experiences with food have a constant influence on the foods selection, while choices made as a result of emotions, self-concept and attitudes can vary from day to day.

Psychological factors such as motivation, personality and attitudes towards food and nutrition had been reviewed and shown to essentially influence nutritional behavior including food neophobia (Zielinska, 2006).

### *2.2. Motivation*

Motivation is a driving force that impels human whether to commit actions, and this is derived from positive and negative motivational forces. Need, desire and wants are the examples of the positive drives while fear or aversions are the examples of the negative drives (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2010). Both of these motivational forces lead a different intensity of the food selection and rejection.

### *2.3. Familiarity with food*

The familiarity of food contributes to the human level of food acceptance and rejection (Tourila, 2001). One might tend to accept or reject something that they need based on their familiarity towards it. To date, familiarity might not only confine in acceptance or rejection of foods only; it also can occur towards the acceptance of goods or services. Several researches have been carried out, and it is found that there is relationship between familiarity and level of acceptance and satisfaction. Herera & Blanco (2011) state that significant differences exist between high and low levels of familiarity in influence of trust on acceptance as well as in the influence of satisfaction and loyalty. Meanwhile, the scholars assert that consumer with greater familiarity and experience with certain product

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