



## Research report

# Prevalence and socio-demographic correlates of time spent cooking by adults in the 2005 UK Time Use Survey. Cross-sectional analysis <sup>☆</sup>

Jean Adams <sup>\*</sup>, Martin White

Centre for Activity and Diet Research, MRC Epidemiology Unit, School of Clinical Medicine, University of Cambridge, Box 285 Institute of Metabolic Science, Cambridge Biomedical Campus, Cambridge CB2 0QQ, UK

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## ABSTRACT

This study aimed to document the prevalence and socio-demographic correlates of time spent cooking by adults in the 2005 UK Time-Use Survey. Respondents reported their main activities, in 10 minute slots, throughout one 24 hour period. Activities were coded into 30 pre-defined codes, including 'cooking, washing up'. Four measures of time spent cooking were calculated: any time spent cooking, 30 continuous minutes spent cooking, total time spent cooking, and longest continuous time spent cooking. Socio-demographic correlates were: age, employment, social class, education, and number of adults and children in the household. Analyses were stratified by gender. Data from 4214 participants were included. 85% of women and 60% of men spent any time cooking; 60% of women and 33% of men spent 30 continuous minutes cooking. Amongst women, older age, not being in employment, lower social class, greater education, and living with other adults or children were positively associated with time cooking. Few differences in time spent cooking were seen in men. Socio-economic differences in time spent cooking may have been overstated as a determinant of socio-economic differences in diet, overweight and obesity. Gender was a stronger determinant of time spent cooking than other socio-demographic variables.

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## Introduction

Overweight and obesity are now endemic in many countries (Ng et al., 2014), with socio-economic inequalities disadvantaging the least affluent often seen—particularly in developed countries and women (Friel & Broom, 2007). Unhealthy dietary patterns are part of the complex causal web of overweight and obesity (Butland et al., 2007).

Decreasing home-cooking skills and increasing socio-economic differences in such skills have been proposed as an explanation for increasingly unhealthy diets, rising overweight and obesity, and socio-economic inequalities in these (Lichtenstein & Ludwig, 2010).

This is reflected in recent policy focuses on teaching cooking skills. In England, cooking and nutrition were recently re-introduced as mandatory components of the primary school curriculum (Department for Education, 2013); and government-commissioned research is exploring the benefits of cooking skills interventions (Adams, Simpson, Penn, Adamson, & White, 2011; Rees, Hinds, Dickson, O'Mara-Eves, & Thomas, 2012). Poorer cooking skills, less frequent preparation of home-cooked food, and more frequent consumption of pre-prepared foods have been associated with poorer dietary quality and overweight and obesity in observational studies (Hartmann, Dohle, & Siegrist, 2013; Larson, Perry, Story, & Neumark-Sztainer, 2006; Laska, Larson, Neumark-Sztainer, & Story, 2012; McLaughlin, Tarasuk, & Kreiger, 2003; Nelson, Erens, Bates, Church, & Boshier, 2007; van der Horst, Brunner, & Siegrist, 2011; Wolfson & Bleich, 2015). However, there is so far an absence of high quality, definitive, experimental evidence on the impact of cooking skills education on diet or body composition (Rees et al., 2012; Reicks, Trofholz, Stang, & Laska, 2014).

Measuring cooking skills is difficult (Barton, Wrieden, & Anderson, 2011), not least because the concept is complex and there is little agreement about what exactly should be measured (Short, 2003). Possessing cooking skills may also be unrelated to everyday use of such skills. Nevertheless, one UK survey, now almost 20 years old, found little clear evidence of educational differences in self-reported confidence in cooking a range of foods (Caraher, Dixon, Lang, & Carr-Hill, 1999). More recent data from the UK reported that

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<sup>\*</sup> Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [jma79@medschl.cam.ac.uk](mailto:jma79@medschl.cam.ac.uk) (J. Adams).

cooking confidence were universally high in low-income households and that over 80% of the low-income population lived in a household where the ‘main food provider’ had well developed cooking skills (Nelson et al., 2007).

One alternative to measuring cooking skills is to measure time spent cooking. Time-use surveys ask respondents to record and account for all of their time (in short episodes) over the course of one or more days. By avoiding focus on any particular activity or behaviour, these surveys may reduce social-desirability bias and provide useful information on a range of activities (Tudor-Locke et al., 2007).

Previous time-use research on time spent cooking has been conducted in the USA (Cawley & Liu, 2012; Kolodinsky & Goldstein, 2011; Mancino & Newman, 2007; Rose, 2007; Smith, Ng, & Popkin, 2013; Zick & Stevens, 2010; Zick, Stevens, & Bryant, 2011), Germany (Moser, 2010) and the UK (Cheng, Olsen, Southerton, & Warde, 2007; Sullivan, 2000). This confirms decreases in time spent cooking since the mid-twentieth century, particularly in women, offset a little by increases in time spent cooking in men. However, women continue to spend substantially more time cooking than men, and more women spend any time cooking than men. Despite noting this, we are aware of only one study in which sex-specific analyses of time spent cooking was conducted (Mancino & Newman, 2007). In the UK, married participants and those with children at home spent more time cooking (Cheng et al., 2007).

There is also conflicting evidence on the socio-economic patterning of time spent cooking. Whilst living in a lower income household is associated with more time spent cooking (Mancino & Newman, 2007; Rose, 2007), female employment is associated with less (Cawley & Liu, 2012; Cheng et al., 2007; Virudachalam, Long, Harhay, Polsky, & Feudtner, 2014).

Time-use and cooking have changed markedly over the twentieth century and are likely to be strongly culturally influenced. It cannot, therefore, be assumed that results from one time or country are generalisable to another. No recent analyses have explored time spent cooking, or its socio-demographic correlates, in the UK. Our aim was to describe the prevalence and socio-demographic correlates of a number of markers of time spent cooking in the UK 2005 Time-Use Survey – the most recent time-use data available from the UK. These, albeit now somewhat historical, data provide the ‘best available’, recent evidence on time spent cooking in the UK.

## Methods

### *Data source*

The National Statistics Omnibus Survey is a monthly, multi-purpose, cross-sectional survey of UK adults. Data are collected by trained interviewers during home visits. Each month interviewers visit a random probability sample of private addresses selected from the Royal Mail’s Postcode Address File of ‘small users’. This is the database of private households in the UK that receive fewer than 50 items of mail per day. It is updated every three months. Sampling is in two stages. Firstly postcode sectors are sampled proportion to their size (that is the total number of addresses contained within each sector); then addresses are selected within sectors at random (Lader, Short, & Gershuny, 2006).

Advance letters are sent to selected addresses explaining the purpose of the survey and stating that an interviewer will visit in the next few weeks. After excluding ‘ineligible’ addresses where there are no current residents, interviewers visit selected households up to eight times at different times of the day and week before coding a household as non-contactable. In contactable households, one resident from all those aged 16 years or over is randomly selected for interview and inclusion in the survey (Lader et al., 2006).

In February, June, September and November 2005, an interviewer administered time-use module was included in the Omnibus Survey. Respondents recalled their main activities in 10-min slots over one 24-h period up to three days prior to the interview – allocated to ensure all days of the week were equally represented (Lader et al., 2006). Together, these four surveys comprise the 2005 UK Time-Use Survey. The original intention of this survey was to answer the question ‘how do we spend our time?’ It is, therefore, multipurpose and data obtained are useful to answer a range of questions. Main activities in each time slot were assigned, at interview, to one of 30 predefined codes, including “cooking, washing up” – referred to throughout as ‘cooking’.

### *Variables of interest*

#### *Time spent cooking*

Four measures of time spent cooking were calculated. Total time spent cooking was calculated from the number of 10 minute slots where “cooking, washing up” was reported by respondents as their main activity. This was used to determine whether any cooking was engaged in or not. Longest continuous time spent cooking was calculated from the number of consecutive 10 min slots where this was the main activity. Based on range of recent, popular, recipe books promoting the concept of ‘30 minute meals’ to home, amateur cooks (Lawson, 2013; Oliver, 2010; Pascal, 2012; Slater, 2006), it was assumed that it takes an absolute minimum of 30 minutes to prepare a main meal and longest continuous time spent cooking was dichotomised into spending at least 30 continuous minutes cooking or not.

#### *Socio-demographic variables*

Socio-demographic variables considered were gender, age (in 10 year age groups), employment status (in paid employment or not), social class, education, and number of adults and children living in the household.

Occupational social class was classified using the National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SEC) collapsed into three groups (higher and managerial, intermediate, and routine and manual occupations) with those not currently in employment classified according to their last main occupation, or that of the head of household if no last main occupation was available (Rose, Pevalin, & O’Reilly, 2005). Age at leaving full time education was recorded as younger than 15 years (below school leaving age), between 15 and 18 years (school leaving age) and older than 18 years (post-school leaving age). Number of adults living in the household was dichotomised into one adult, and two or more adults. Number of children living in the household was dichotomised into no children (aged 15 years or younger), and one or more children. These dichotomies allowed the questions of whether living with other adults, or with any children, had any influence on cooking patterns to be explored. For instance, adults may share responsibility for cooking, and the presence of children may be associated with cooking becoming a higher priority.

#### *Statistical analysis*

Complete-case analyses were performed with all analyses restricted to those who provided full data on all variables of interest. As many socio-economic variables are unstable in early adulthood, individuals aged younger than 25 years were excluded from the analysis.

The association between socio-demographic variables and each measure of time spent cooking, after mutual adjustment for all other variables, was explored using separate regression models. Multiple logistic regression was used for the dichotomous outcome variables (any time spent cooking, and at least 30 minutes spent

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