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Determination Of Raw Food Perception Of University Students

Abstract

This study aimed to determine the perceptions of undergraduate students studying in the Gastronomy and Culinary Arts department regarding the raw food diet. The study determined the perceptions of students who do not consume raw food, in what undergraduate kind of situations and for how long they would consider implementing a raw food diet based on their level of knowledge about raw food. The study was conducted with 40 volunteer students studying at Sarıkamış Tourism Faculty, Department of Gastronomy and Culinary Arts. Interviews were tested with content analysis. As a result of face-to-face interviews with students, their perceptions of raw food were grouped under two main themes; negative and positive. The main negative perceptions of the participants about raw food are vitamin and protein deficiency. The main positive perceptions of the participants about raw food are that it is healthy and has high nutritional value. The results of the study revealed that, while most of the students could implement a raw food diet if necessary, they also stated that they could prefer this type of nutrition if they were given information about raw food diet.

Keywords: Gastronomy, Healthy nutrition, Raw food.



ÜNİVERSİTE ÖĞRENCİLERİNİN ÇİĞ BESLENME ALGI DÜZEYLERİNİN BELİRLENMESİ

Öz

Bu çalışmanın amacı Gastronomi ve Mutfak Sanatları bölümünde öğrenim gören lisans öğrencilerinin çiğ gıda diyetine ilişkin algılarını belirlemektir. Çalışmada çiğ beslenmeyen öğrencilerin çiğ beslenme ile ilgili bilgi düzeyleri neticesinde nasıl bir algıya sahip oldukları, hangi durumlarda ve ne kadarlık süre içerisinde çiğ beslenme uygulamasını düşündükleri belirlenmeye çalışılmıştır. Çalışma, Sarıkamış Turizm Fakültesi, Gastronomi ve Mutfak Sanatları bölümünde eğitim gören gönüllü 40 öğrenci ile yapılmıştır. Görüşmeler içerik analizi ile test edilmiştir. Öğrenciler ile yapılan yüz yüze görüşmeler sonucunda, öğrencilerin çiğ beslenmeye yönelik algıları olumsuz ve olumlu olmak üzere iki ana temada toplanmıştır. Katılımcıların çiğ beslenme ile ilgili olumsuz algılarının başında vitamin ve protein eksikliği gelmektedir. Katılımların çiğ beslenme ile ilgili olumlu algılarının başında sağlıklı olması ve besin değerinin yüksek olması gelmektedir. Araştırma sonucuna göre öğrencilerin çoğu zorunluluk halinde çiğ beslenebileceklerini belirtirken, çiğ beslenmeyle ilgili bilgi verilmesi halinde bu beslenme türünü tercih edebileceklerini de ifade etmişlerdir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Gastronomi, Sağlıklı beslenme, Çiğ beslenme.



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Introduction

Changes in economic, social, and cultural areas due to globalization also manifest themselves in eating and drinking habits (Özdiç, 2004), and it is observed that food and beverage establishments and the services they offer have differentiated (Doğdubay & Giritlioğlu, 2011; Kivela & Crotts 2006). People's tastes, desires, likings, enjoyment levels, eating and drinking habits, palatal tastes, and even the concepts used in language take a new form due to globalization, and it becomes inevitable that all these are reflected in touristic products and reach more and more areas every day.

On the other hand, health-related expectations are not limited to disease prevention but also include improving quality of life. In this context, dietary habits play an important role. People pay attention to nutrition not only to satisfy their hunger but also to maintain a healthy life and avoid potential diseases (İşleröğlu et al., 2005). Nutrition is both a need and a strategy at this point.

People's aspirations to improve their standard of living are shaped by their knowledge and behavioral development. These aspirations include the goal of living a healthier and higher-quality life. Each day, individuals seek ways to prolong their lifespans while continuing this process in a healthier and more vigorous manner. Instead of adopting a solely treatment-oriented approach to health problems, the tendency to take preventive measures is increasing in parallel with the increase in general health awareness in society (Erbaş, 2006).

In the developing, changing, and constantly renewing food and beverage sectors, different nutritional trends are known and implemented day by day. Some of these trends include slow food, fusion cuisine, molecular gastronomy, edible flowers and insects, surf & turf, vegetarian cuisine, and raw food. The raw food movement has attracted a lot of attention lately and has many followers around the world (Madenci, 2018).

In the raw food movement, products that are described as "raw food" are consumed. Raw food can be defined as unprocessed foods that have not been subjected to any heat or chemical processing and have been grown using mostly animal manure. Vegetables, fruits, grains, legumes, herbs, and nuts have a very important place in the raw diet. On the other hand, raw food is a concept used to define foods served to be consumed live/semi-live, living foods, which are presented in different ways. While this concept describes meat and its derivatives in Asian cuisine, it refers to plants, fruits and vegetables, and sprouted seeds in Western cuisine and is used together with the concepts of fresh food and raw food (Cousens, 2003; Fry & Klein, 2004).

Although the raw food movement has become quite popular recently, it has been a diet practiced since the 19th century, when the idea that people could be protected from diseases by consuming only uncooked foods was put forward. Reasons such as the desire to be healthier, protection against diseases, living a long life, religious beliefs, economic opportunities, protecting the world and preventing climate change, animal welfare, and some ethical rules are stated to be among the factors that play a role in the preference of raw food. There is no official statistical information yet on how many people in the world and in Türkiye have adopted the raw food diet, which can be considered a strict form of vegetarian nutrition (Aktaş & Algan Özkök, 2018). In conclusion, as individuals' awareness of health and nutrition increases, the preference rate for raw food increases. This trend increases both the individual's development of conscious eating habits for their own health and the food industry's efforts to offer healthier products. Nutrition has become a strategy that improves the quality of life of individuals, rather than an action that merely aims to provide satisfaction.

The aim of the study is to determine the perceptions of Gastronomy and Culinary Arts undergraduate students about raw food. In this direction, it is tried to determine how the concept of raw food creates a perception in people, what the reasons may be for people to prefer raw food and how long they think they will prefer it.

As a result of the researches, there is no study on raw food with undergraduate students. With the literature review, it is aimed that there is a gap in the field related to this subject and it is aimed to benefit the researchers who will study on this subject.

A. Conceptual Framework

Historically, the food prepared by humans before the discovery of fire constituted the first step toward a raw food habit. Although it has been forgotten with the discovery of fire, many people and cultures have maintained their interest in raw food throughout history. For example, while Herodotus, known as the “father of history,” is known to have eaten raw food, Pythagoras learned the virtues of raw food during his time working with the Essenes sect. Pythagoras transferred the information he acquired here to Socrates and Plato, leading the way in bringing raw food to ancient Greece (Januszeski, 2013). In ancient Greece, famous mathematicians, philosophers, and priests ate raw food. Hippocrates, one of the pioneers of medicine, said that “raw food is the best medicine” and that it prolongs life and creates resistance against diseases. Sylvester Graham introduced his view that people would never get sick if they consumed their food raw in the mid-19th century (Cunningham, 2004: 1623). Raw food has become an acceptable form of nutrition in many countries, including India, Italy, Switzerland, France (Leitzmann, 2014), and Germany (Kwanbujan, Koebnick, Strassner & Leitzmann, 2000), as well as Türkiye.

The concept of raw food is defined as the consumption of fruits and vegetables, seeds, nuts, legumes, and sprouted grains that can be consumed without cooking. In the concept of raw food, foods must be either raw or cooked at a maximum of 46°C (Kralji et al., 2017). In addition, this nutrition type includes organic and sun-dried foods that have undergone any processing. The sprouting process, which is considered a good alternative in raw food, improves the nutritional properties of cereals and legumes, and products with high nutritional value, such as protein, vitamins, dietary fiber, antioxidants, and minerals are obtained. Therefore, sprouted grains and legumes have a very important place in raw food diet (Okur & Madenci, 2019).

Today, the raw food diet is presented as a way to be more resistant to diseases, to be energetic, to live at a healthy weight, and to have healthy digestion (Howell, 1995; Cohen, 2004; Fry and Klein, 2004; Schenck, 2008; Knowler, 2010), as it is argued that with a raw food diet, foods are taken completely without losing any of their enzymes, minerals, and vitamins. Therefore, although the raw food diet has existed in human life for many years, it has recently emerged as a trend in the world and has managed to reach large masses in many countries, including California, Canada, Spain, England (Cousens, 2005; Knowler, 2010; Leitzmann, 2014; Reid, 2006), and Turkey.

When the relevant publications are examined, it is possible to say that the number of studies on eating and drinking habits has increased (Ankeny, 2012; Cohen & Avieli, 2004; Kim et al., 2011; Kivela & Crotts, 2006; Long, 2004; Nield et al., 2000; Su, 2015; Tezcan, 2000), and different types of nutrition have been frequently included in studies in recent years (Dilek, 2017; Fox & Ward, 2008; Kwon & Tamang, 2015; Leitch, 2013; Özdiñ, 2004; Yasemin, Son, & Bulut, 2016; Yurtseven & Kaya, 2011). From this point of view, when the historical process from the past to the present is taken into consideration, it can be seen that many developments have been experienced, from healthy nutrition to pleasure, from appealing to the palate and visual pleasure to different and innovative applications, from fast food to slow food, from organic consumption and fresh food to raw food, and from food festivals to taste and speed competitions.

B. Method

The population of the study consists of students of the Gastronomy and Culinary Arts Department of Sarıkamış Tourism Faculty at Kafkas University. The sample of the study consists of 40 students who agreed to participate voluntarily in the interview between January 2-15, 2025, and who are knowledgeable about the concept of raw food. A semi-structured interview form was used as a data collection tool in the study. When preparing the interview questions within the scope of the study, the form used by Karaman and Soylu (2020) in their study to determine the raw food perceptions of Gastronomy and Culinary Arts doctoral students was used. The interviews were conducted with volunteer participants between January 2-15, 2025. During the interviews, participants were asked a total of 10 questions within the scope of the study. The first three questions were demographic

information questions, while seven questions were about the participants' positive and negative perceptions about raw food diet.

Content analysis was used to analyze the research data, as this method can provide repeatable and valid results regarding the content of the data at hand (Krippendorff, 1980). However, content analysis is a method that uncovers valid interpretations within a text. The interpretations in the texts evaluated in this method are generally about the sender of the message, the content of the message, and the receiver of the message (Weber, 1989). Therefore, the content analysis method is quite suitable for the purpose and scope of this study.

The research plan for content analysis consists of eight stages. These are, respectively, establishing hypotheses, sampling, units of analysis, measurement, training of coders, coding, statistical procedures, and analysis. The names of the codes were obtained by extracting them from the data.

Here, an inductive technique was used to create a meaningful integrity. In the creation of the theme, the codes were obtained from the quantitative data. A deductive approach was adopted by using the information obtained. A total of 40 students who had knowledge about raw food diet participated in the study. The reliability of the study was achieved through the Kappa test. The Kappa test is used to measure the reliability of agreement between two or more observers (Kılıç, 2015). Following the Kappa reliability test, the data were tested using a statistical package program. According to the test results, reliability between coders was determined as 0.91. The test results revealed a reliability coefficient of 0.91 between coders.

C. Results

Participants were asked about their thoughts on the positive and negative aspects of raw food diet. The results of the content analysis performed on the answers to the questions are shown in Table-1.

Table 1: Opinions on the Pros and Cons of Raw Food Diet

No	Negative Opinions							Positive Opinions				Σ
	Protein Deficiency	Unhealthy	Digestive Problems	Unsavory	Vitamin Deficiency	Harmful Microorganisms	Not Cooked	Detox Effect	High Nutritional Value	Healthy	No Heat Treatment	
P1	x	x	x						x		x	5
P2			x	x	x		x			x		5
P3					x	x		x				3
P4		x		x	x		x		x			5
P5			x	x		x				x	x	5
P6	x	x						x				3
P7			x	x	x		x		x			5
P8					x		x		x			3
P9	x	x			x					x		4
P10				x	x			x		x		4
P11	x			x		x	x				x	5
P12	x		x		x				x		x	5

P13		x		x				x				3
P14			x	x	x	x			x			5
P15	x		x				x			x		4
P16	x				x			x			x	4
P17	x				x					x		3
P18		x	x		x				x			4
P19		x						x				2
P20					x	x				x		3
P21	x		x		x				x			4
P22	x						x			x	x	4
P23	x	x						x	x			4
P24			x	x	x					x	x	5
P25			x			x	x	x		x	x	6
Σ	11	8	10	9	15	6	8	8	9	10	8	102
%	11.22	8.16	10.2	9.18	15.3	6.12	8.16	8.16	9.18	10.2	8.16	100.0

Participants' negative thoughts about raw food were divided into seven categories: protein deficiency, unhealthy, digestion problems, unsavory, vitamin deficiency, harmful microorganisms, and not cooked, while the positive thoughts were divided into four categories: detox effect, high nutritional value, healthy, and no heat treatment.

Based on the participants' responses, the most negative perception of raw food (15.3%) was vitamin deficiency, while the least negative perception (6.2%) was harmful microorganisms. The most common (10.2%) positive aspect of raw food was that it is healthy, while the least common (8.6%) was its detox effect and that it is not heat-treated. Other questions asked to the participants were, "Where did you hear about the concept of a raw food diet?" and "If you were given information about raw food, would you consider doing it?", "Which situations would you consider preferring it in, and for how long would you consume it? The results of the content analysis performed on the responses are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Participant Demographics and Thoughts on Raw Food Diet

Variable	N	F	%	Variable	N	F	%
Sex				Following a Raw Food Diet When Informed			
Female		28	70.0	Yes		33	82.5
Male		12	30.0	No		7	17.5
Total	40			Total	40		
Age				Raw Food Preference Situations			
18-19		9	22.5	Necessity		29	72.5
20-21		16	40.0	Health Problem		8	20.0
22 and older		15	37.5	Detox		3	7.5
Total	40			Total	40		
Income Status				Raw Food Consumption Duration			
Upper		8	20.0	Less than 1 week		25	62.5
Middle		22	55.0	1-2 weeks		6	15.0

Lower		10	25.0	1 month		6	15.5
Total	40			1 month – 1 year		2	5.0
The Way Information on Raw Food Is Acquired				1 year and longer		1	2.5
School		18	45.0	Total	40		
Media		2	5.0				
Written Source		5	12.5				
Gastronomy Fair		1	2.5				
Business Owner		14	35				
Total	40						

When the demographic information of the undergraduate students participating in the study is examined, it is found that there are 40 participants, 28 (70%) of whom are female and 12 (30%) are male. It was revealed that 22.5% of the participants were between the ages of 18-19, 40% were between the ages of 20-21, and 37.5% were 22 years old and above. According to the data on their income status, 20% were in the upper-level income, 55% in the middle-level, and 25% were in the lower income group. The participants were asked how they heard about the raw food diet. Participants stated that they heard about it mostly from schools (45%), business owners (35%), written sources (12.5%), media (5%), and gastronomy fairs (2.5%). To the question, "Would you consider consuming raw food if you were given information about it?" 82.5% of the participants answered yes, and 17.5% answered no. In response to the question "In what situations would you consider choosing raw food?" the most common responses were "in cases of necessity" (72.5%), "in cases of health problems" (20%), and "detox" (7.5%). When asked about the duration of consuming raw food, 62.5% of the participants said they would consume it for a month, 5% for a month to a year, and 2.5% for a year or more. Table 3 illustrates the division in participants' perceptions of raw food.

Table 3: Themes on Raw Food

Themes	Statements Used	Σ_i	$\Sigma_i (102)$	%	%
Negative Statements	Protein Deficiency	11	67	11.22	65.6
	Unhealthy	8		8.16	
	Digestive Problems	10		10.2	
	Unsavoriness	9		9.18	
	Vitamin Deficiency	15		15.3	
	Harmful Microorganisms	6		6.2	
	Not Cooked	8		8.16	
Positive Statements	Detox Effect	8	35	8.16	34.3
	High Nutritional Value	9		9.18	
	Healthy	10		10.2	
	No Heat Treatment	8		8.16	

Participants expressed their perceptions of raw food in 11 categories in total. These categories were grouped under two main themes: negative and positive about the raw food diet. The participant responses were categorized under the theme of negative perception: 11.22% of the statements were "protein deficiency," 8.16% "unhealthy," 10.2% "digestive problems," 9.18% "unsavory," 15.3% "vitamin deficiency," 6.2% "harmful microorganisms," and 8.16% "not cooked." In relation to the positive perceptions theme, 8.16% of the responses were related to "detox effect," 9.18% were "high nutritional value," 10.2% were "healthy," and 8.16 %were related to "no heat treatment."

Conclusion and Discussion

This study aimed to determine the perceptions of undergraduate students studying in the Gastronomy and Culinary Arts department regarding the raw food diet. The analysis of the interviews revealed two themes in relation to students' perceptions on raw food that are positive and negative. The participants' main negative perceptions of raw food were vitamin and protein deficiency. In the study conducted by Karaman and Soylu (2020), participants stated that they were concerned about being deficient in proteins and vitamins that are essential and obtained from animal products. Kwanbunjan et al. (2000) reported that raw feeding may cause health problems if strictly implemented. Raba et al. (2019) are of the opinion that a raw food diet should be applied at short intervals. The raw food diet has several functions that are evaluated negatively. The low intake of some nutrients, such as calcium, vitamin B12, zinc, iron, and long-chain n-3 fatty acids, which are also encountered in people with a vegetarian or vegan diet, is considered a significant problem. Although plant proteins meet protein needs, the proportion of animal protein is low in people who do not consume animal products. Vitamin C and other organic acids in vegetables and fruits increase iron absorption. For this reason, people who eat a plant-based diet have a higher need for iron than others (Craig and Mangels, 2009). The fact that not all foods can be consumed without being cooked is considered a negative feature of the raw food movement because some foods only reveal their nutritional value when they are cooked.

The main positive perceptions of the participants about raw food diets are that it is healthy and has high nutritional value. In their study, conducted by Havala and Hobbs (2005), it was determined that people who ate raw food considered it healthy. Raw foods are easier to digest than cooked foods. It is stated that people with cancer, heart disease, kidney disease, food allergies, high blood pressure and cholesterol, hormone imbalances, muscle pain, osteoporosis, obesity and weight control problems, and those with fatigue complaints will benefit more from raw food.

It is seen that all food and beverage businesses, especially those that offer vegan and raw menu services, include raw foods such as salads or appetizers in their menus. These businesses can make the foods on their menus more delicious and/or more consumable by improving them with different methods and techniques. In this way, food and beverage businesses can provide a better dining experience for their existing customers while also developing new customer potential by encouraging individuals who do not eat raw food to choose them.

The study was conducted with undergraduate students of the Gastronomy and Culinary Arts department. The limited sample size can be expanded by including students of associate degrees such as Culinary Arts. Considering the positive perception results toward raw food, nutritionists and businesses should raise public awareness by carrying out joint studies.



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This work is original.

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