

Food barometer measures a population's eating habits

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Almost 40% of all Malaysian meals are consumed outside the home. Credit: 123rf.com

A survey by Taylor's-Toulouse University Centre (TTUC) is collecting

data on the food habits of individuals and how their choices are related to modernisation and other social factors. Results show that almost 40% of all Malaysian meals are consumed outside the home – one of the highest dining out rates worldwide.

Malaysia is well known for its diverse cuisine. As a country where many Asian cultures meet, it hosts a growing number of food restaurants. In the meantime, the urbanisation, middle class and service sector of Malaysian society are increasing rapidly, making more and more Malaysians choose to eat in restaurants for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

According to Professor Dr Jean Pierre Poulain, Chair of Food Studies: Food Cultures and Health at TTUC, this phenomenon is increasing the risk of Malaysians developing non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, hypertension and cardiovascular disease "because when you cook less, there are more parts of your [diet] that you do not control."

"In terms of coping with the rise in obesity and non-communicable diseases, the restaurant industry is on the front line of the problem as well as the solution," says Professor Poulain.

In 2013, the Chair of Food Studies launched a unique survey – called the Malaysian Food Barometer (MFB) – that examines where Malaysians eat their meals, what they eat, and how their choices relate to [modernisation](#) and other [social factors](#).

The MFB provides data and infographics about Malaysians' [food habits](#), the food culture of Malaysian society and its relationship with demographic factors such as social status, level of education, ethnicity, gender, age and household size. The survey also explores the correlation between the lifestyle of individuals and their body size (obese, overweight, normal or underweight).

So far, the MFB has revealed that more than 38.5% of all Malaysian meals (breakfast, lunch, dinner and supper) are consumed outside the home. According to the survey, this result positively correlates with urbanisation and will likely increase in the coming years.

"As this is probably one of the highest rates [of dining out] worldwide, it raises concerns for diet management and higher risks of non-communicable diseases and obesity," he says. "The Malaysian society thus represents an interesting context to better understand the role of social organisation in eating decisions and consequences for public health."

Professor Poulain is now widening the team's current collaboration, which currently includes three other universities and the industrial sector, to conduct a second round of the MFB. He plans to increase the survey size – which was originally a nationally representative, 2,000-person sample – and compare current eating trends in Malaysia with other [food](#) barometer data around the world.

Provided by Taylors university

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