

Exploring barriers to fresh and total pork consumption among children: parental perspectives

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Background & Aim

- Dietary habits formed during childhood influence dietary choices made throughout the lifespan.
- Previous Pork CRC funded research found that whilst 50% of Australian children surveyed consumed pork, only 7% ate fresh pork (Nolan-Clark et al., 2013)
- Investigating factors impacting fresh pork consumption during childhood is important for the development of targeted marketing campaigns to encourage pork consumption through the lifespan.
- The aim of this study was to investigate parents' perceptions of factors affecting their children's consumption of pork, particularly fresh pork.

Methods

- Six semi-structured focus groups conducted (n=31 participants, parents/carers of children aged 2-16 years)
- Discussion questions focused on children's pork preferences, factors which encouraged or discouraged pork consumption (particularly fresh pork), and parents' perceptions of value-added fresh pork products
- All focus groups were digitally recorded, transcribed verbatim and analysed to identify key themes
- Ethical approval granted

Project outcomes

Table 1: Characteristics of focus group participants

Gender:	
- Females	24 (77.4%)
- Males	7 (22.6%)
Mean (range) age of participant:	42.5 years (range: 27 – 57 years)
Highest level of education:	
- Year 10	0 (0%)
- Year 12	2 (6.5%)
- TAFE or equivalent	5 (16.1%)
- University	23 (74.2%)
- Not stated	1 (3.2%)
Number of children:	
- One child	8 (25.8%)
- Two children	15 (48.4%)
- Three children	6 (19.4%)
- Four children	2 (6.5%)
Mean (range) age of children (in selected age range only)	8.4 years (range: 2 – 16 years)

Project outcomes

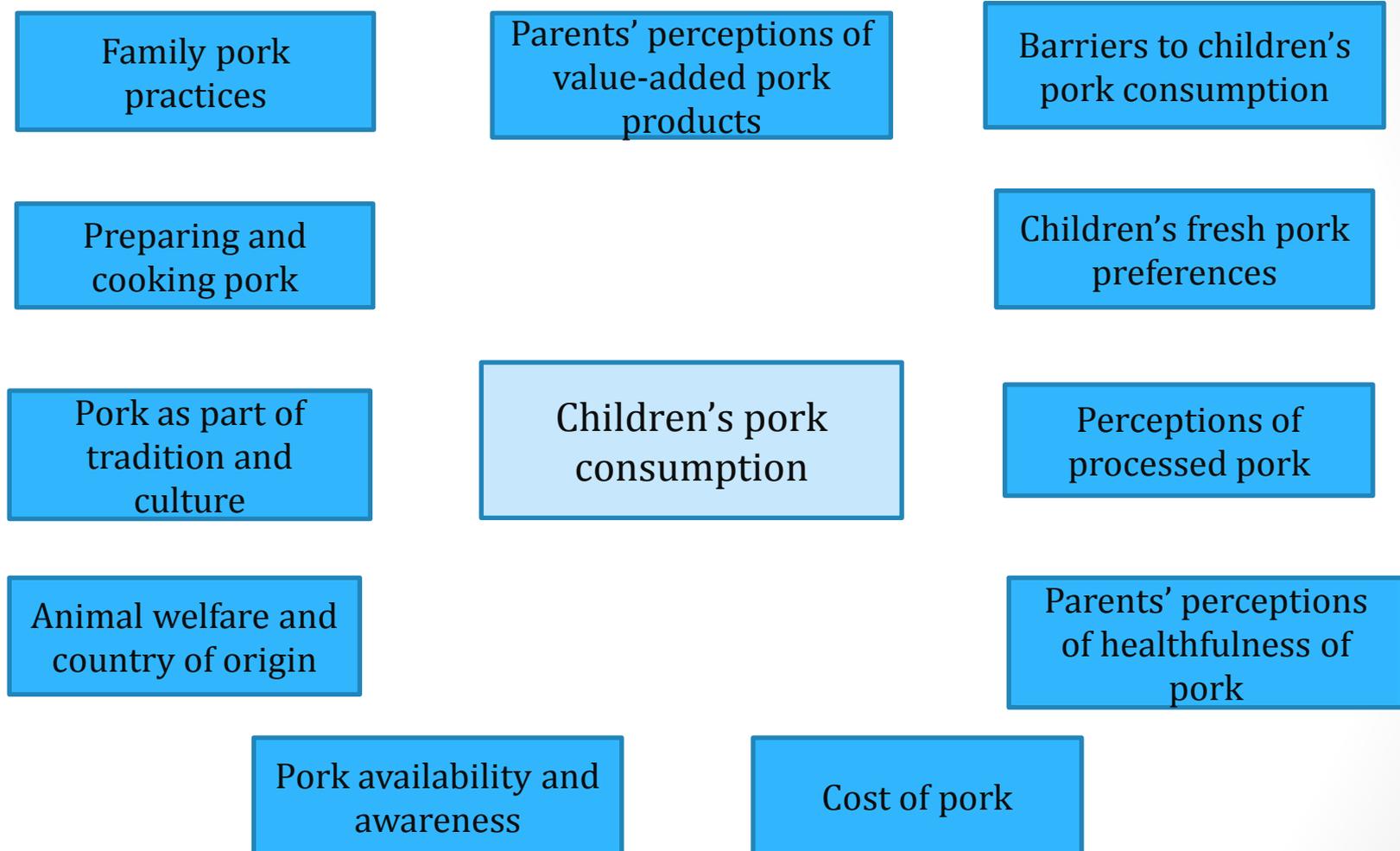


Figure 1: Themes perceived to influence children's pork consumption

Project outcomes – key themes (1)

Family pork practices

- Pork was used in a variety of ways by participants, including on its own (eg. pork chops) and in mixed dishes (eg. pork stir fry or curry)
- Many participants felt their children's pork consumption was driven by their own food preferences

Pork as part of tradition or culture

- Family and cultural traditions impacted upon the type and amount of pork served by participants
- Participants with an Asian background tended to serve more fresh pork to their children
- Fresh pork was frequently associated with special occasions (eg. roast pork at Christmas)
- Religion did not impact on pork consumption for the majority of participants

Project outcomes – key themes (2)

Preparing and cooking pork

- Pork was viewed as being acceptable to prepare for children, and was seen as being of similar convenience to beef
- There was a strong perception that fresh pork needed to be cooked until well-done to avoid food poisoning

“I do I make sure I cook it [pork] well because I know it can’t um be pink like your beef, it’s got to be cooked like you cook your chicken” (Group 1, female, mean child age 12)

- Lack of confidence or experience in cooking fresh pork was a common barrier to serving pork to children
- There was a strong desire for new fresh pork recipes, particularly those that are fast & convenient

“I’d say if the...pork manufacturers want to encourage me to eat more pork, I probably need it to be presented in, these are all the different things you can do with pork, maybe ways that I haven’t thought about pork” (Group 6, female, mean child age 15)

Project outcomes – key themes (3)

Animal welfare and country of origin

- Animal welfare and country of origin concerns were not a major determinant of pork consumption, although some participants discussed concern over farming practices
- Children's television programs that featured pigs (eg. Peppa Pig) had a negative impact on children's willingness to eat pork
- Overall participants did not check country of origin when purchasing pork

Cost of pork

- Perception of the cost of fresh pork varied between participants, although most felt it to be more expensive than chicken

"Yeah I think price wise you kind of go chicken, beef, pork, lamb"

(Group 5, female, mean child age 15 years)

- Overall, the cost of meat in general was a concern for many participants

Project outcomes – key themes (4)

Pork availability and awareness

- Fresh pork was perceived as being less visible in shopping outlets than other meats

“I think in supermarkets as well there’s, you go in there’s a massive say beef or chicken section, and pork is, sometimes you’ve got to hunt for it” (Group 1, male, mean child age 6.5 years)

- Participants also felt that there was a limited variety of fresh pork cuts available in shopping outlets, when compared to other meats
- Whilst many participants recalled the ‘Get Some Pork on Your Fork’ advertising campaign, they felt fresh pork was advertised less heavily than other meats
- Television cooking programs influenced participants’ purchasing patterns and their children’s willingness to eat foods featured on them. Participants felt including pork on a cooking program would inspire them to purchase and prepare it

“If I saw it on one of the big shows, yeah I’d definitely go out and buy it then. And if it tasted good, which it usually does when you see it on tv it looks like it’s going to taste nice, and then in your head it tastes nice, then it’d probably appear on the menu for a while”

(Group 2, male, mean child age 9 years)

Project outcomes – key themes (5)

Perceptions of the healthfulness of pork

- Overall fresh pork was perceived to be a healthy meat, although this was viewed as being dependent on the cut selected and the cooking method used
- Processed pork was viewed as being less healthy due to the sodium and fat content
- Participants felt they were unaware of the nutritional benefits of consuming pork, in comparison to other meats

“...I think of beef being high in iron cos it’s bright red, and I think, well if I’m going to have a white meat, I’m gonna have chicken, so it’s like I don’t need to have it [pork] in my diet, kind of thing”

(Group 6, female, mean child age 7 years)

Perceptions of processed pork

- Processed pork was viewed as being convenient and well-accepted by children
- Participants also expressed greater confidence when preparing processed pork, than fresh pork

Project outcomes – key themes (6)

Children's fresh pork preferences

- Participants reported their children preferred fresh pork when presented as part of a mixed dish (eg. pork stir fry or curry)
- Involving children in the preparation of meals, or preparing foods which required children to use their hands were discussed as strategies to encourage children to eat fresh pork

“Yeah I must say fun foods seems to work with our guys at the moment, I often do pork mince in tacos in things like that and because the kids are allowed to eat with their hands they absolutely love it”

(Group 3, female, mean child age 3 years)

Barriers to children's pork consumption

- Fussy eating was a barrier to many foods, including fresh pork, resulting in parents preparing foods they knew their children would eat (eg. chicken dishes)
- Some children perceived pork as a fatty meat, which acted as a barrier due to health concerns (for older children specifically) and taste preferences
- The texture of fresh pork was also a barrier for children particularly when it had been overcooked and become dry

Project outcomes – key themes (7)

Perceptions of value added pork products

- Many participants viewed value added pork products to be convenient, and particularly suitable for when time poor

“I think those things are a convenience thing, they’re just there just to have just something in the freezer that you can grab quickly”

(Group 2, male, mean child age 14 years)

- There was skepticism regarding the quality of meat used, with pre-marinated products thought to be disguising poor cuts of meat
- Value added pork products were generally perceived to be too expensive to purchase regularly, although many participants felt they would purchase them if they were discounted
- Concern regarding the portion size of pre-packaged value added products was also discussed, with participants with larger families feeling they were too small, whilst those with younger children felt the portion sizes were too large

“yeah I’ve bought the ones where there are two and so I’d need to buy two packets, so that makes it quite expensive, cos we will have one each, so yeah regardless of how much of it you eat it’s quite a large amount of money to spend”

(Group 3, female, mean child age 15 years)

Summary

- Focus group research suggested fresh pork was viewed as being a healthy meat to provide to children
- A lack of cooking confidence and a need for convenient, fast recipes was discussed by parents
- Fresh pork was viewed as being less visible than other meats, and participants were unaware of the unique nutrition characteristics of fresh pork
- Participants also expressed confusion regarding the need to cook pork until it is well-done
- Value added fresh pork products were viewed as being convenient, however cost, portion size and mistrust of contents were barriers to intake

Applications

This research has identified several potential opportunities to improve the acceptability of pork in children's diets:

- Provide parents with time-efficient, convenient fresh pork recipes (including those that children can engage with)
- Engage parents with fresh pork preparation and cooking strategies through television programs or brand ambassadors, including dispelling the myth on the need to cook pork until well-done
- Educate parents on the unique nutrition benefits of fresh pork
- Consider providing value-added marinades separately to meat to improve consumer trust