Author's response to reviews

Title: Time trends in social differences in nutrition habits of Lithuanian population: 1994-2010

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Dear Editors,

We thank reviewers for their helpful critique of our manuscript. Below please find our response to the reviewer’s comments and description of changes we have made to the manuscript.

**Reviewer 1: Laura Paalanen**

1. *The language of the manuscript should be checked by a native English speaker.*

   The manuscript was edited by the person whose native language is English.

2. *Table 1: Could you add response rates per year? Please correct the age group categorization (20–34, 35–49?).*

   Response rates per year were added to Methods section (Study design). The age group categorization was corrected.

3. *Table 3, 4, 6 and 7: Could you add a footnote for x (eating fresh vegetables daily in 1994). The issue has been covered in Methods, but please specify here as well.*

   Done (x-data are not available).

4. *Methods/Study design: Could you add a reference to the survey “Health behavior monitoring among Lithuanian adult population” where interested readers could find more information about the methodology of the survey?*

   Two references were added:


5. *Methods/Socio-demographic characteristics: Could you broaden this chapter. At least you could add a sentence “Education and place of residence were chosen…”.* In addition, you could tell more about the question on education.

   Such sentence was added: ‘Education and place of residence were chosen as socio-demographic determinants’.

   Also we explained how level of education was determined and the educational categories were defined.

6. *Methods/Socio-demographic characteristics: You write: “The respondents were grouped as living in cities, towns and villages according to administrative classification*
of the place of residence.” Can you explain in more detail how this was done in practice? Did you link the data to data from e.g. Lithuanian statistical authority and get the administrative classification from there or was the classification based on respondents’ answers in the questionnaire? In that case, what kind of questions they were?

We explained the grouping of participants according to place of residence as follows: ‘According to the administrative classification of places of residence, the respondents were grouped as living in cities, towns or villages. The addresses of respondents, obtained from the National Population Register, were used for determination of living place. Cities included the capital city and four largest cities, towns – the centers of municipalities and towns with population at least 2000 inhabitants, villages – small towns and countryside.’

7. The last words in Results are “only in few surveys”. I don’t think that survey is an appropriate word here.

We eliminated the word ‘survey’ and indicated the concrete year when the differences were found (‘Urban-rural differences in daily consumption of vegetables were small, but reached statistical significance in men in 2000 and 2006, and in women reached significance in 2004 and 2006’).


The reference by Valsta was replaced by recommended paper.

9. Discussion (page 10): You write that “a number of studies demonstrated that consumption of oil-based spreads on bread are common among highly educated people”. However, you only refer to two Finnish and one Scottish study. Could you find support for this argument from some other country or area? When you move on to your own findings, you could kind of remind the reader of your study population (E.g., “Our findings from Lithuania…”). By the way, we have made a comparative study in Pitkäranta in the Republic of Karelia and North Karelia in Finland (Paalanen et al. Socio-economic differences in the use of dairy fat in Russian and Finnish Karelia, 1994-2004. Int J Public Health. 2010 Aug;55(4):325-37). We found that in Pitkäranta (Russian Karelia) just like in Lithuania, the use of butter on bread was more common among persons with a higher education, whereas in North Karelia, Finland, the opposite was true. Maybe it would be interesting to discuss this in your paper, because the transition period theme connects our article to your study.

The discussion section was modified. The study in North Karelia and Pitkäranta was cited.
10. **Discussion (page 12):** You refer to recommendations ("the diet of a large part of population does not meet recommendations on healthy nutrition"). Could you add the nutrition recommendations you refer to as a reference? Or does the "State Food and Nutrition Strategy and Action Plan for 2003–2010" include nutrition recommendation to which you have compared your study results?

Done - the reference 17th is Lithuanian recommendations on healthy nutrition

11. **Discussion:** In your paper, you use data from 1994–2010, and the data includes subjects that were 20–64 years old at the time of responding. Thus, the data includes persons that have been born during about years 1930–1990. How might this affect the education classification? Might having only primary education or on the other hand university education have different meaning for persons born in the 1930’s or late 1980’s? Please discuss this as a limitation of the education measure in your study.

The problems, related to assessment of education level, were discussed: ‘The level of education within a population increases over time; therefore, a comparison of educational differences in food habits over a period of 16 years may be biased. In Lithuania, the system of primary-secondary-higher education developed between the two world wars. In Soviet times, the education system was rather uniform. The development of Lithuania’s current system started in the 1990s. Since 2003, it covers preschool, general, secondary, vocational, and higher (college and university) education. After reform of the vocational education system, college, as a higher education institution, was established. We grouped all respondents with college and vocational educations into one category, in order to maintain comparable educational categories throughout the study period’

12. **Figures 1–4:** Please change 100% as the maximum to Figures 2 and 3 (like in Figure 1). The levels of the food habits are easier to compare like this. You can consider, whether you could use 100% as the maximum in Figure 4 as well, or whether it is better to keep it at 50%.

Done

**Reviewer 2: Cecile Knai**

1. Though the manuscript is well written, it would greatly benefit from being edited by a native English speaker as there are several syntax errors and other mistakes.

The manuscript was edited by the person whose native language is English.

2. The **Background section includes essential information but which is not organised is a logical way. The reasons underpinning health inequalities are mixed in with the impact that inequalities has on populations, followed by the health status of Lithuanians and behaviours/risk factors that may have contributed to health inequalities...it doesn’t flow and would benefit from being more structured/organised.**
The Background section was rewritten following the recommendations of reviewer.

3. In the Discussion, the authors tend to repeat the results and provide explanatory patterns, but this is not very convincingly presented. It would be useful to focus on the explanatory factors, and provide more depth on these, and then really the most useful information was about the Action Plan, but the reader is left hanging...What happened after 2010, was the strategy/action plan not renewed and if so, why not? What is meant by intersectoral cooperation problems, and so forth. This is the core of the question, because otherwise the study remains at the level of individual dietary behaviour, without adequately addressing the 'upstream' factors which are more likely to have an impact.

The Discussion section was modified. We discussed about the explanatory factors that might have impact on the trends in food consumption: social and economic causes as well as implementation of food and nutrition policy. Further actions in the renewal of Food and Nutrition Action Plan were described.

We hope that the actions we have taken in response to reviewers’ comments have enhanced the quality of the paper.

Respectfully,

On behalf of all authors
Vilma Kriaucioniene