



Youth Perspective on Vegan Diet: A Social Work Lens

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ABSTRACT

The study explores how today's youth perceive the vegan diet, investigating their motivations, challenges, and the social, cultural, and economic factors shaping their choices. Using a mixed-method approach that combines surveys and qualitative case studies of youth aged 18–30, the research finds that ethical concerns, environmental awareness, and health are major motivators, while social pressure, cost, and accessibility are key barriers. The paper argues for stronger social work involvement in food justice and health promotion through education, policy advocacy, and institutional support.

Keywords: Veganism, Youth, Social Work, Food Justice, Sustainability, Dietary Choices, Public Health

Introduction

Background Veganism, once a fringe movement, has gained global popularity due to growing concerns about health, animal welfare, and the environment. For youth, food choices are increasingly linked to identity and ethical values. While some embrace veganism wholeheartedly, others find it challenging due to cultural norms, peer pressure, and economic limitations.

Problem Statement

Despite increased visibility of veganism, there remains limited understanding of youth-specific perspectives, particularly in non-Western or diverse socio-economic contexts. This study addresses this gap by highlighting the lived experiences of young vegans and non-vegans.

1.3 Objectives

- To explore how youth perceive vegan diets
- To identify motivations and barriers for veganism
- To analyze how social, cultural, and economic influences shape youth choices
- To suggest social work interventions for promoting ethical and sustainable diets

Methodology

The study employs a mixed-method approach:

Surveys (n=150): Distributed online to youth aged 18–30 from urban, rural, and semi-urban backgrounds.

Case Studies (n=10): In-depth qualitative interviews capturing personal experiences, motivations, and barriers.

Thematic Analysis: Identified patterns across narratives and survey data.

Ethical Considerations: Informed consent, anonymity, and voluntary participation were ensured.

Key Findings

Motivations

Ethical Concerns (e.g., animal cruelty, factory farming)

Environmental Awareness (e.g., climate change, deforestation)

Health Benefits (e.g., improved digestion, reduced risk of chronic diseases)

3.3 Barriers

Social Pressure: From family, peers, and cultural events

Economic Factors: High cost of vegan alternatives

Accessibility: Limited availability in small towns and institutions

3.3 Role of Social Media Social media platforms significantly influence youth by providing education, inspiration, and community support.

3.5 Gender & Region-Based Insights Urban youth and females were more likely to adopt veganism. Rural participants showed interest but lacked resources.

Discussion:

Social Work and Food Justice

Social work plays a critical role in promoting food justice:

Advocacy: Promote policies that support plant-based diets in schools, workplaces, and public institutions.

Community Engagement: Develop peer-support groups and local plant-based food networks.

Cultural Sensitivity: Incorporate traditional plant-based recipes in awareness campaigns.

Public Health Collaboration: Work with healthcare systems to reduce diet-related illnesses through vegan education.

Recommendations

Increase institutional access to affordable vegan meals

Include plant-based nutrition in school curricula

Support student-led sustainability clubs

Promote government subsidies for plant-based products

Launch culturally tailored awareness campaigns

Conclusion

Youth are increasingly drawn to veganism, yet face substantial social and structural barriers. Social work can bridge the gap by advocating for food equity, promoting education, and creating inclusive spaces for dietary diversity. This study provides a foundation for further research and action on ethical eating and sustainability.