

# Psychological perspectives on microplastics in food and drink: Insights from qualitative and quantitative approaches.

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Public concerns about the potential effects of plastic pollution on human health are high, especially following evidence of microplastics (MPs) in food and drink. However, scientific evidence on human health effects is currently unclear, and knowledge gaps remain regarding sources, pathways and toxicity. We combined qualitative and quantitative approaches to gain insight into factors underlying people's concern as well as support for plastics-reducing policies.

First, we conducted interviews with 32 members of relevant involved groups along the food chain (i.e., harvesting, processing, hospitality, consumption, regulation). Although knowledge levels were diverse, interviewees expressed concerns about human health risks alongside low certainty about underlying processes. Systemic changes on the regulatory level were called for.

To gain further insight into relevant factors influencing public risk perception and policy support, we conducted a representative survey of the Austrian adult population (N = 741). We found (1) relatively high concern about MPs in food/drink; (2) high support for plastics-reducing policies, and higher support for pull than push measures; (3) risk perception was predicted most by biospheric values, negative affect, and indirect exposure through talking to others; (4) the pattern of predictors for policy support differed between push and pull measures (e.g., perceived scientific consensus and trust in science predicted higher support for pull but not push measures).

In sum, these studies contribute to understanding different groups' understanding of MPs in food/drink, and factors underlying risk perception and policy support. This is crucial for developing effective and acceptable policies, especially where scientific knowledge is still incomplete.

## Are you currently an Early Career Researcher?

Yes, I am still a student or have not yet received my Ph.D.

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