

EATING HABITS OF PRIMARY SCHOOL PUPILS

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Abstract: *The probe is in the field of primary schools catering for pupils, deals with the eating habits of pupils in second level primary school in Brno. It is based on a history of school meals, which monitors to the present. Using a questionnaire and interviews with pupils compares eating in the family and at school. It deals with the influence of family eating habits on the choice of meals in the school canteen. In a contribution to analyse the specific data obtained from 150 pupils Brno schools and theories are compared with a healthy diet. The authors of the attempt to find a relationship between the satisfaction of pupils with school board and school climate.*

Keywords: *diet, eating habits, nutrition, satisfaction, school climate, school meals, family*

Eating Habits in the School Environment

Beginning of school attendance is a very important dividing line in physical as well as mental development of children. The child gains the role of a pupil and learns new behaviour patterns. Schools put cognitive and social demands on pupils. In the social sphere, these demands can be understood as a child's ability to cope with evaluation of its results and comparison with peers. A number of pupils encounter eating in school environment for the first time in their life.

Healthy food and appropriate drinking regime facilitate good school results. A primary school means a great change in pupils eating habits – encountering a new eating situation can influence the school results, relationship to school, teacher and classmates in a positive or negative way.

A well prepared and organized school eating leads pupils to acquiring good eating habits and keeping hygienic and social norms. Another important point is that pupils learn to eat regularly. In the school dining-room, the child encounters more diverse food than it was used to at home. This fact facilitates its ability to change one's eating habits in adulthood and accept new meals.

However, school dining-room might become a place that makes the child feel

anxious. Negative experience connected to eating might influence learning process, relationship with pupils and teachers and sometimes even lead to development of neurotic disorders. At some schools teachers control whether pupils ate the whole meal and check whether they do not return too much food. And teachers do not take into account that the child feels full. This situation is stressful to pupils, they are afraid of being punished for leaving food.

The influence of peer group on eating is of great importance as well. If a dominant classmate expresses negatively about smell or taste of the offered meal, it usually leads to a chain reaction to the meal among all classmates.

Fraňková (Fraňková, 2000) mentions that results of researches in the field of school meal plan show that the structure of meals is improving. The use of fat and butter decreases. These provisions are replaced by vegetable oil. On the other hand, the consumption of fish and poultry increases. If the school meal plan is quality, it helps to remove some bad eating habits from home.

School meal plan, as well as one's nutrition in general, has to fulfil nutrition demands and have to reflect the consumption basket.

Consumption Basket

It is a continually up-dated file of nutrition norms or limits that have to be respected when preparing a school dining-room menu. Consumption Basket is based on nutrition recommendation in the Czech Republic and sets a monthly consumption of certain types of food per person and day in grams.

The Ministry of Education and Sport in the Czech Republic prepares a new version of ordinance about school meal plan. The reason is new findings in the field of nutrition. First of all, the new version has to be discussed with the Ministry of Health of the Czech Republic. A problematic area is quality of food provided in school dining-rooms. Nowadays, the quality of food is evaluated according to the consumption basket, which is created by a computer method based on valid nutrition amounts. The new version of the ordinance will bring along adaptations of the current consumption basket or development of a new method observing fulfilment of the recommended day amounts of nutrients in education institutions. The Ministry of Health of the Czech Republic proposed to manage the nutrition quality of food in school dining-rooms with the help of recommended variety of food in monthly menu.

The menu is prepared by a certain eating facility itself. The fulfilment of consumption basket is based on contracts with food suppliers. The manager of an eating facility is responsible for the content of the menu. Parents can also express their opinion about the menu through School Board. However, their conception of the menu has to be in accordance with consumption basket. In case there is a disagreement about the menu between parents and school, it is the eating facility (which quite often means the school) to decide. School meal plan is not compulsory and, therefore, the use of this service is up to the parents.

The Cult of Body

“If an identification with one’s body does not take place, there is a danger of creation of a negative attitude, hatred and refusal of one’s body. Children can consider the body they do not like as a culprit of all their problems and might punish it. Failure in social relationships and profession, etc. is connected to this problem as well. The incidence of these problems is usually independent of one’s look, however, a number of girls have the opinion that they would do better, if they have been more attractive, e.g. thinner.” (Vágnerová, 2004)

Social norms put bigger emphasis on eye-appeal of women than men (therefore, a larger number of women than men suffer from eating disorders). The desired shape of an ideal men’s body is different from women’s. The men’s ideal shape is manly and muscular. Fitness and weight lifting in men can be as addictive as anorexia in women.

Media present a clear ideal of women’s beauty. A presentation of extremely thin girls, for example in beauty contests, advertisements, etc. influences the perception of young women and girls – they become their models and for majority of women also unachievable ideals. The more the real life differs from the ideal, the bigger is the risk of feeling of inferiority, underestimation, complex and in worse cases also depression.

The fact that the “cult of body” influences younger and younger children is alarming. It is common that 11-year old girls copy their parents with various reduction diets, refusal of food, observation of oneself in a mirror or, on the other hand, refusal of such an observation. They feel ashamed for their look and do not like themselves.

“We have to teach the ways to face media since childhood. Therefore, it is necessary to explain to children the mechanisms of influencing and teach them values that are left out in advertisements.” (Konečná, 2005).

Eating Disorders

“Eating disorders are one of the most common illnesses. Furthermore, they belong among chronic illnesses with serious somatic, social and psychological consequences. Therefore, they are one of the most serious illnesses of adolescent girls and young women. It causes long-term problems not only to ill persons but to their social environment as well.” (Krch, 1999)

Among the most common forms belong mental anorexia and mental bulimia. There is a visual difference between extremely thin anorectic girls and bulimic girls with average weight, however, the two illnesses are very similar. Both syndromes contain fear from being fat, extreme interest in one’s look, observation

of one's body shape – this image is often deformed. Both syndromes also exhibit pathological attitude to food. Under pretence of healthy nutrition, eating habits are very often changed. Vegetarianism or macrobiotics becomes very popular in this period

Eating disorders are a typical illness of young girls and women. However, men are not excluded. The most common rate of boys and girls is 1 : 10. The prognosis of the illness is not straightforward. Problems even after termination of a treatment are observable in 30 to 40 %. Suicide occurs in 1 % of cases and 6 % of ill persons die because of the illness.

Aim of Research

The main aim of this research is determination of nutrition and eating habits of higher primary school pupils.

Setting of Hypothesis

After having finished the data analysis from all questionnaires (n=143), we focused on two groups of respondents that we found the most interesting. Therefore, they were submitted to further research. The first group contained boys and girls who were on diet and in a risk of incidence of eating disorders.

The second group had one common feature – appropriate meal plan containing 5 meals per day prepared according to principles healthy nutrition. This criterion was the starting point for setting of hypothesis for this group of students. Both groups were divided into boys and girls and research was conducted in the two groups separately.

Characteristics of the sample

The focus of the empirical part is put on pupils of higher primary school – more precisely seventh to ninth-grade pupils with age ranging from 12 to 16 years. The total number of respondents was 143, out of which 59 were girls and 84 boys. The age distribution was as follows: age 12 – 5,59 %; age 13 – 42,66 %; age 14 – 34,97 %; age 15 – 15,39 %; age 16 – 1,39 %.

Research Methods and Techniques

A quantitative research technique of questionnaire was chosen. Closed as well as open questions were used in the questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into three areas – 1st area dealt with school boarding, 2nd area focused on eating habits in family and free time of respondents, 3rd area is a small exploration of pathologies in eating habits.

Realization of research and data analysis

The research was conducted in the time period May to June 2007 at primary school Křídlovická 30b in Brno. We were allowed to realize the research as a part of lessons of practical education.

Selective classes with extended Math, Science and IT Education were established for pupils of sixth to ninth grade. Their schedule is extended with extra math, physics, chemistry and IT lessons.

Primary school Křídlovická is a faculty school of the faculty of Education, Masaryk University, Brno. Therefore, it offers possibilities for teaching practice of students of the faculty and takes part in research projects of the faculty.

Results

Questions 1 to 4 (Do you eat in the school dining-room? If you had the choice, would you prefer eating at home or at school? Why have you chosen this type of boarding?) showed that almost 80 % of girls and 84,5 % of boys eat in the school dining-room. Out of the total number of students using the school boarding, 83 % of girls and 71,8 % of boys are satisfied with it. Only for illustration, we present the percentage distribution of choices of meals in the observed period. The 1st meal was chosen by majority of pupils (50-80 %), it means traditional Czech cuisine (least favourite were meals minced meat with leek and rice, the most favourite was baked chicken with sesame and potatoes). The second meal was chosen by 12-47 % of pupils; this meal is less traditional meat meal (least favourite were liver on thyme with almonds and the most numerous choice was potatoes dumplings filled with smoked meat and cabbage). The third meal was chosen by 2-16 % of pupils; these are vegetarian meals (the lowest number of pupils chose celery salad with apples and blue cheese, the most popular was fruit salad with cream).

The question no. 3 tries to find out about preferred place for eating and contains full number of respondents again. 54,2 % of girls would prefer eating at home and 44,1 % eating at school. A higher percentage of boys prefer eating at home (77,4 %) to eating at school (20,2 %). Answers to this questionnaire are not straightforward. Even respondents not using school boarding answered this question. It is worth mentioning that 4 girls and 2 boys eating at home would prefer eating at school. Answers of girls show that 67,8 % of them have better conditions for eating at home and 32,2 % at school. Boys mentioned better conditions at home in 85,7 % , only 9,5 % of boys like school dining-room better and 4,8 % could not decide.

Questions 5 and 6 (Do you have a snack at school? If you have a snack, who prepares it for you?) found out that 89,8 % of girls eat a snack at school. Out of this number, parents prepare a snack for 58,5 % of them, 26,4 % prepare the food themselves and 15,1 % receive money to buy it. 10,2 % of girls do not have a snack at school.

Boys have a snack at school in 88,1 %. Parents prepare it to 59,5 %, 18,9 % prepare a snack themselves and 21,6 % get money to buy some food. 11,9 % of boys do not have a snack at school.

The question 12 dealt with the influence of parents on children's eating habits.

The results show that 50,8 % of girls feel that their eating habits are influenced by parents, 35,6 % do not feel any influence and 13,6 % feel partially influenced. Boys feel influenced in 59,5 %, not influenced in 27,4 % and partially influenced in 13,1 %.

The same eating habits as their parents have 52,5 % of girls. Different eating habits can be found in 32,2 % and partially different in 15,3 % of girls. 60,7 % of boys have the same eating habits as parents, 26,2 % have different habits and 15,3 % consider their eating habits as partially different.

Questions 15 and 16 (Are there any restrictions in boarding in your family? What are the reasons for restrictions in meals?) revealed that only 3,4 % of girls and 2,4 % of boys experience some restrictions. In two cases of girls the restrictions are given by vegetarianism and with boys, we speak about macrobiotics and vegans.

Question 17 (How often do you eat sweets (chips, chocolate, etc.)) that the most frequent choice is 2 – 3 times a week (in 27,1 %) and once a fortnight (also 27,1 %). 57,9 % of girls prefer and buy sweets. 61,9 % of boys buy sweets 2–3 times a week and half of it consists of sweets. The question asking for frequency of meals per day was answered in the following manner: the majority of girls eat 3-4 times a day and 33,3 % of boys eat 6 and more times a day.

There are reduction diets in the families of girls in 45,8 % and in the families of boys in 51,2 %. Even though the number of girl and boys who have never been on a diet is not higher than number of children being on a diet, these numbers are alarming – 28,8 % of girls and 10,7 % of boys are on diet. The question asking about satisfaction with ones figure (Are you satisfied with your figure?) received a majority of positive answers from girls. However, we have to point out that the percentage of highly negative or negative answers is considerable.

Negative perception of one's body is closely connected to eating disorders and the cult of body. Literature shows the danger connected with this phenomenon and its influence on one's self-esteem, etc. Furthermore, children should receive enough nutrients to ensure healthy growth and that, in our opinion, is not achievable with reduction diets.

The scientific literature also points to the fact, that parents are models for their children (not only in the field of eating habits, of course). This is reflected in answers to question asking about the extent of parents' influence on children's eating habits. The majority of girls being on a diet have a member of the family who is also on a diet. Interestingly, a majority of girls supplied information on which family member it is. The most frequent were mothers, followed by older sisters.

When creating this hypothesis (H III.) we assumed that girls/boys on a diet do not eat in the school dining-room. Furthermore, we expected that girls/boys on diet try to reduce their meal plan as much as possible by not only refusing boarding at school but by not having lunch at all. The answers of girls show that their eating in the school

dining-room is not given by their preference of the place but facts such as living far from school, busy parents, etc. On the other hand, we can find very positive answers in the questionnaires praising the food, conditions in the dining-room and also the possibility to eat together with friends. It is not rare to find an answer that nobody controls the child and the amount of food it consumes at school.

In our opinion, signs of pathological behaviour can be found in answers of some respondents – girls. For one girl a reason for eating home alone is that “nobody can see me at home, nobody watches the way I eat and what kind and how much food I consume. Among the other reasons was the possibility to prepare the food themselves and check the amount of calories.

Concerning the importance of parents’ model in eating habits (Is any member of your family on a diet with the aim to reduce weight?) we found out that two boys mentioned family members being on a diet – in one case it was father and in the other, the respondent was on a diet together with his older sister.

Both boys and girls mention the fact that parents are too busy to prepare lunches for them.

In these answers, we have not found any traces of pathological behaviour (in contrast to girls). Boys prefer eating at home because they are used to it and the offer of meals is wider and better. One boy mentioned noisiness of the school dining-room. Preference of the school dining-room can be found as well, the reason is a possibility to eat together with friends. Reasons from which girls do not eat in the school dining room are as follows: one respondent mentions the fact, that there are no vegetarian meals in the menu (she is a vegetarian); two respondents have meals prepared by parents; one respondent prepares meals herself. Preference of school dining-room is prevalent in this group (13 respondents preferring the school dining-room to 5 preferring eating at home). Reasons for preference of the school dining room are: “a possibility to eat with friends”; tastiness of food and a choice from three meals are mentioned often. One respondent answered: “If it were possible, I would not eat at all.”

A majority of boys is satisfied with the school dining-room; however, if they had the choice, they would choose eating at home. The most common reason is “home is home”.

Boys, as well as girls, understand that parents do not have time to prepare lunches during week. Girls often mentioned the possibility to eat with friends as important, in contrast to boys. Furthermore, they express their opinion about neither quality nor choice of meals.

Summary

The empirical part used a questionnaire method to find out about eating habits of seventh to ninth-grade pupils of one primary school in Brno. Furthermore, it attempted to identify a group of pupils endangered by incidence of an eating disorder. There were 143 respondents in the research, out of which 59 were girls and 84 were boys. Respondents were intentionally divided according to their sex as we wanted to identify sex-related differences.

The topic of nutrition should not be left out as wrong acquisition of eating habits in children is a growing problem nowadays. Nutrition has to be perceived in the context of social life, family and a personality of a developing child.

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STRAVOVACÍ NÁVYKY ŽÁKŮ ZÁKLADNÍ ŠKOLY

Souhrn: Příspěvek je sondou do oblasti stravování žáků základní školy, zabývá se stravovacími návyky žáků druhého stupně ZŠ v Brně. Vychází z historie školního stravování, které sleduje do současnosti. Pomocí dotazníku a rozhovorů s žáky porovnává stravování v rodině a ve škole. Zabývá se vlivem rodinných stravovacích návyků na výběr jídla ve školní jídelně. V příspěvku se analyzují konkrétní údaje získané od 150

žáků brněnských škol a jsou porovnávány s teoriemi zdravé výživy. Autoři příspěvku se pokouší najít vztah mezi spokojeností žáků se školním stravováním a školním klimatem.

Klíčová slova: strava, stravovací návyky, výživa, spokojenost, školní klima, školní stravování, rodina