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Informing food policies in post-primary schools in Ireland: Knowledge to Action

Ms. Mary Callaghan & Dr. Colette Kelly
Health Promotion Research Centre, NUI Galway

Knowledge to Action: Using Research Evidence in health Promotion Policy and Practice
15th June 2016
• High prevalence of overweight and obesity in children in Ireland
  • 20-25% primary school children
  • 19% of teenagers
  IUNA, 2005, 2008

• Nutritional habits of Irish adolescents not optimal
  IUNA, 2005

• Eating out of home
  Mikkelsen et al, 2011

• Social, physical and individual factors

• School food environment
  • Children - time in this setting
  • External & Internal foodscape
Aims

The project aims to explore young people's perception of their food environment, to include:

• The number of food outlets ‘close’ to their school
• What type of food do they buy at the food premises
• Barriers to accessing food outlets of their choice
• Perception of a need for change or maintain status
• What food environments they use
• ‘Quality’ of food outlets within walking distance of schools
Methods

• Qualitative study to explore young people's perception of their school food environment

• Ethics granted by NUIG REC

• Schools contacted and recruited by phone

• Data collected April - October 2015

• One class period ~40 mins
  • Mapping exercise
  • Group discussion with topic guide
Methods

Mapping exercise

- Write in the names of the food outlets within walking distance of their school in their approximate location
- Highlight those they use
- Draw a boundary around your food environment

Discussion
- Type of food premises around school
- Access to those premises
- Food premises frequented most
- What they bought there
- Why they buy there
- Why they don't go to alternative premises
- Barriers to accessing alternative food premises
- If they are happy with what is available
Exploring the food environment study
2015

Map number:
Participants

- 6 post-primary schools recruited
  - 1 Male, 3 Female, 2 Mixed
  - Non DEIS
  - Large town/city

- 95 Students (63% girls, 37% boys)

- Aged 12 -18 years

- Younger class (1\textsuperscript{st} or 2\textsuperscript{nd} Year) & older class (4\textsuperscript{th}, 5\textsuperscript{th} or TY)
Results - places

- Local health food shop
- Local supermarkets
- Sweet shops
- Local restaurants
- Local hotels
- Local pubs
- Local cafes
- Local fast food places
- Spar/Londis/Centra/Costcutter
- Topaz
- Subway
- Apache/Papa Johns/Dominos
- Supermacs/McDonalds/BK
- Easons
- Lidl/Aldi/Dunnes
- Supervalu
Results - food

- Health bars
- Sesame sticks
- Water
- Yoghurt
- Milk
- Energy drinks – Edge, Lucozade sport
- Coffee
- 7up/Coke
- Flavoured water
- Biscuits
- Croissant
- Polo mints
- Chocolate
- Sweets
- Curried rice
- Wedges
- Sausage and chip
- Curry or stir fry or chips
- Chicken rolls
Male student 4th Year: “Not really.”

“Like, if you were getting food out there it’s about... how many places ye could go that’s healthy like? It’s... more unhealthy than there is healthy.”

Female student 4th Year: “Not really.”

“There’s always such a long queue if you’re not down early as well everything’s usually gone coz the tech across the road as well like so.”

Female student TY: “Yeah.”

“... sometimes it would be actually nice to have a place that would be literally just for like students where they can pick up their lunch and kinda... at a good rate as well.”

Male student 2nd Year: “It’s grand. It’s fine.”

“It’s kind of expensive still though like because other schools have canteens and they’re really cheap compared to what you get up the town.”

Female student 2nd Year: “Sometimes.”

“Because sometimes I walk all the way there and they don’t have what I want.”
Conclusion

• First time HBSC Ireland have collected qualitative data exploring students perceptions of their food environment

• Help inform future policy on how best to address the nutritional needs of young people

• Enabling the healthy choice to be the easier choice is difficult

• Legislation and awareness of creating healthy communities/healthy cities the way forward?
Acknowledgements

- Schools and parents who gave their consent
- Children for their participation and consent
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- Millennium Fund Project Call
Questions?