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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
Context

• 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
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
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
- Lidl/ Aldi/ Dunnes
- Local restaurants
- Local hotels
- Supervalu
- Local pubs
- Easons
- Subway
- Apache/ Papa Johns/ Dominos
- Local fast food places
- Local Cafes
Results - food

- Health bars
- Nuts
- Milk
- Yoghurt
- Water
- Sesame sticks
- Energy drinks – Edge, Lucozade sport
- Curried rice
- Sausage and chip
- Curry or stir fry or chips
- Flavoured water
- Wedges
- Chicken rolls
- Chocolate
- Biscuits
- Polo mints
- Sweets
- Croissant
- Coffee
- 7up/Coke
- Milk

Wedges
Male student 4th Year: “Not really.”

“Like, if you were getting food out there’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.”
Barriers

Location

Price

Time

Other
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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Questions?