Healthy eating policies and school food; associations with dietary habits.

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Outline

- Overweight/obesity among youth

- Health promoting schools
  - Supportive environment
  - Healthy policies

- Policies & dietary habits
  - Questions posed
Obesity among youth in Ireland

• 1 in 5 teenagers – overweight or obese (IUNA, 2008)

• Consumption of energy-dense, nutrient-poor foods & drinks and not enough fruit & vegetables (HBSC 2007, 2012; IUNA 2005, 2008)

• Obesity is strongly determined by social, cultural and economic factors and physical environment

• National Obesity TF (2005) recommendations:
  • schools policies to promote healthy lifestyles; code of practice – provision/content of vending machines
Supportive environments

• Health Promoting Schools (HPS) emerged in 1980s

• A HPS – “is a school that constantly strengthens its capacity as a healthy setting for living, learning and working” (WHO 1997).

• Ireland - Network of Health Promoting Schools 1992 (www.schoolsforhealth.eu)
Study Aims

- To explore healthy eating policies in post-primary schools in Ireland.

- To investigate the internal school food environment in post-primary schools.

- To examine associations between healthy eating policies and student’s dietary habits.
Methods

- Post-primary schools (n=119) were invited to take part in a school level questionnaire on school policies & school food environment

- Email, phone-call, & follow-up

- Data collected using survey monkey or paper-based questionnaires.
Methods

- Questionnaire:
  - School characteristics
  - Nutrition
  - Physical Activity
  - Violence/Bullying
  - School neighbourhood

- Data exported to SPSS 20.0 and linked to school level data on intake of fruit, vegetables and soft drinks.
Food policies & communication to stakeholders (%)

- Healthy Eating policy: 53.2% (Yes), 14.5% (Verbal), 15.9% (Written)
- Limit sweets/crisps policy: 50.8% (Yes), 14.5% (Verbal), 15.9% (Written)
- Bring sweets/choc to school: 88.9% (Yes)
- Inform students: 64.4% (Yes)
- Inform parents: 37.5% (Yes)
- Inform teachers: 42.9% (Yes)
Food service provision in schools

- Canteen: 57% schools (n= 36)
- Tuck Shop: 49% schools (n= 31)
- Vending machines: 35% schools (n=22)
School food provision - healthy

- Low fat/skim milk: 0.0% (C), 19.4% (V), 87.1% (T)
- Whole milk: 0% (C), 22.6% (V), 87.1% (T)
- Yoghurt: 3.2% (C), 22.6% (V), 55.6% (T)
- Veg/Salads: 0% (C), 22.6% (V), 50.0% (T)
- Fruit: 22.6% (C), 22.6% (V), 69.4% (T)
- Sandwiches: 0% (C), 41.9% (V), 80.6% (T)
- Wholegrain bread/rolls/wraps: 0% (C), 29.0% (V), 80.6% (T)
- Fruit/veg juice: 0% (C), 41.9% (V), 72.2% (T)
- Bottled water: 0% (C), 77.8% (V), 87.1% (T)
School food provision – unhealthy

- **Diet soft drinks**: 5.6% (Canteen), 35.5% (Tuck shop)
- **Soft/sports/fruit drinks**: 25.0% (Canteen), 64.5% (Tuck shop)
- **Chocolate milk+**: 12.9% (Tuck shop), 30.6% (Canteen)
- **Chips**: 0.0% (Canteen), 47.2% (Vending machine)
- **Conf/biscuits/cake/crisps**: 22.2% (Canteen), 74.2% (Tuck shop)
- **Warm drinks**: 9.7% (Tuck shop), 61.1% (Canteen)
- **Pizza**: 3.2% (Canteen), 38.9% (Vending machine)
- **Ice cream**: 2.8% (Canteen), 3.2% (Vending machine)
- **White bread/rolls/wraps**: 35.5% (Canteen), 75.0% (Tuck shop)
## Results: Correlations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SOFT DRINKS</th>
<th>VEGETABLES</th>
<th>FRUIT</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Policy to increase healthy eating (f&amp;v)</td>
<td>-0.305 *</td>
<td>0.207 ns</td>
<td>0.139 ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>leave at lunch - 1st yr</td>
<td>0.379 **</td>
<td>-0.231 ns</td>
<td>-0.306 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>leave at lunch - 2nd yr</td>
<td>0.508 **</td>
<td>-0.281 *</td>
<td>-0.405 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>leave at lunch - 3rd yr</td>
<td>0.469 **</td>
<td>-0.369 **</td>
<td>-0.39 **</td>
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<tr>
<td>leave at lunch - transition yr</td>
<td>0.474 **</td>
<td>-0.197 ns</td>
<td>-0.422 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>leave at lunch - Pre LC yr</td>
<td>0.459 **</td>
<td>-0.233 ns</td>
<td>-0.377 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>leave at lunch - LC yr</td>
<td>0.358 **</td>
<td>-0.149 ns</td>
<td>-0.199 ns</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<0.05; **p<0.01, ns: not significant; Daily consumption of food products
Summary

- Majority of schools have healthy eating policies
  - Are they translated into practice?
  - Formal policies required?
  - Need for better communication of policies to stakeholders?

- Variety of food on offer in schools
  - Is food provision optimal in schools?

- Healthy dietary patterns (i.e. soft drinks) are more likely in schools with healthy eating policies
  - Impact on overweight/obesity?
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Questions?