

Nutrition Environments and the Development of Taste Preferences: A Cross-Sectional Study of Primary School Children in Trinidad and Tobago

Authors : Fareena Alladin

Abstract : In the Caribbean, issues of food security, health and taste are intricately linked, seen most clearly in the increasing incidence of lifestyle diseases among children coupled with a taste for high calorie and Westernized diets. In order to fully appreciate this link, the role of nutrition environments must be examined. To this end, the present study incorporates tenets of Bourdieu's social constructivist theory with the Community Nutrition Environment Model. The aim of this study was to examine the relationships between availability of and access to healthy/unhealthy foods within nutrition environments, namely the household and school, and the development of taste preferences for healthy/unhealthy foods among primary school children in a selected educational district in Trinidad and Tobago. A cross-sectional survey of 400 children between the ages of 9 and 11 years was conducted. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS 24. Results indicated that availability of healthy food at home was positively correlated with preference for vegetables, and negatively correlated with preference for salty snacks and fast food. The availability of unhealthy food within the home was found to be negatively correlated with preference for vegetables and positively correlated with preference for salty snacks. Access to unhealthy foods at school had a positive correlation with preference for fast food. These findings highlight the role of the food environment in shaping taste preferences, and point to the need for interrogating the centrality of food security concerns in emerging health concerns of Caribbean countries. Such interrogations are a necessary part of the development of research agendas, and policy formulation and implementation.

Keywords : food security, nutrition environment, taste preference, Trinidad and Tobago

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