

Examining the Eating Habits of Families – Research Proposal Introduction

The benefits of having a healthy balanced diet: Examining the Eating Habits of Families – Research Proposal

Introduction

The benefits of having a healthy balanced diet have been well documented. A healthy, balanced diet occurs when the foods eaten provide all the essential nutrients an individual requires. The essential nutrients can be found in a variety of foods such as; fruit and vegetables, wholegrains, dairy products, lean meat and fish (Insel et al., 2015). Public Health England (2017) recommends that foods high in fat, sugar and salt should be limited, and when consumed, they should be consumed in small amounts. Individuals that eat a balanced diet through their life stages are less likely to become malnourished as well as develop health conditions such as cardiovascular disease, stroke, diabetes, obesity and some cancers (World Health Organization, 2015).

Although well documented, individuals are still not eating as healthy as they could be. According to the WHO (2017), updated global figures have revealed that in adults, over 1.9 billion were overweight, with 650 million of those being obese. Whilst in 2016, more than 340 million children and adolescents age 5-19 years were also recorded as being overweight or obese. These figures are likely to exist due to the lifestyle and environmental changes that have occurred over the years (Hartmann et al., 2012).

The National Diet and Nutrition Survey identified that only 8% of children age 11-18 years were consuming 5 portions of fruit and vegetables each day. Whilst for adults, 27% of 19-64 year olds and 35% of over 65's met the 5 a day recommendation. The survey also found that sugar and saturated fat is still being consumed in amounts greater than the recommendations (Public Health England, 2016).

Snacking is a common occurrence nowadays amongst children, adolescents and adults. It generally involves eating foods that are high in sugar or fat, consuming instant foods regularly

and skipping meals such as breakfast (Lee et al., 2014).

The home setting has been considered a vital location where children can develop both healthy and unhealthy dietary habits (Nepper and Chai, 2016). According to Patrick and Nicklas (2005, cited in Bauer et al., 2012), this is important as parents that have healthy eating habits not only prevent themselves from future ill health, they also prevent their children from adopting poor eating habits and developing illnesses later on in their lives.

However, with more mothers working nowadays than in previous years, family dietary patterns have changed (Lee et al., 2014). According to Bauer et al. (2012), working mothers have been identified to purchase readymade meals including takeaways and eat out more often, therefore, they frequently miss out on eating meals as a family.

As a result of the literature reviewed, the following will be based on a proposed study to examine the eating habits of families.

Aims

The proposed study has developed 4 main aims. They are as follows:

1. To examine the eating habits of families and determine whether they are meeting the dietary guidelines.
2. To discover where the family meals are consumed and whether there are distractions such as television, phones and other devices.
3. To identify how often microwave meals or take outs are consumed by the family.
4. To identify any possible barriers to the family consuming healthy foods or eating meals together.

Once completed, the proposed research study may be of use to parents, schools and health promotion specialists.

Methodology

Participants

A sample of at least 25 parents/carers over the age of 18, will be recruited through a local primary school and social media sites. Eligible participants would be those whom have at least

one child living in the family home. It is preferred that the child/ren have permanent residence of the family home, as this could enable the results of their eating habits to be consistently and accurately recorded. At least 25 of the participants will complete a questionnaire, whilst 6 participants will be interviewed and finally, 4 participants will complete the food diary for themselves and their child.

Instrumentation

The overall design of this study will use a mixed methods approach using both qualitative and quantitative data. According to Greene et al. (1989, cited in Migiro and Magangi, 2011), using both qualitative and quantitative methods in a study can enable a more thorough analysis. A validated questionnaire designed by Golan and Weizman (1998) to discover family eating and activity habits will be partially used for this study. Not all questions were deemed appropriate, therefore, only the relevant questions will be used along with other specifically designed questions suitable for families. A questionnaire was selected for this study as there are several advantages to them, such as being inexpensive, a quicker way to gather data for analysis and enabling the respondents to be more comfortable answering due to their anonymity (Drummond and Murphy-Reyes, 2017).

A semi-structured interview asking open ended questions will be the method used to gather qualitative data. The process will involve using an audio recorder to allow the answers to be accurately captured and therefore, the data can be correctly analysed. Interviewing participants for this study was recognised as a way for the researcher to gain in-depth, qualitative information regarding the participant and their families eating habits. Also, the researcher wants to find out why the families eat the way they do, and identify possible barriers as to why the family are unable to eat together or eat healthily.

A food diary will be used in this study to identify all foods and beverages consumed over a 7-day period using both a child and their parent. Once analysed, comparisons can be made against the government recommendations and it will be evident whether their diets are sufficient. A food diary has been chosen for this study to allow a clearer picture into what the individuals

are consuming, also, they do not rely on the participants memory, unlike recall methods (Ortega et al., 2015). The diary is expected to identify whether the individuals are consuming their 5 a day, eating foods high in fat and sugar too frequently and their consumption of snacks. Day et al. (2001), claims that the 7-day food diary is a better technique to assess dietary intake compared to other methods.

Procedures

Upon agreement from the parents/carers to partake in the proposed study, an information sheet will be given to them outlining details of the study, instructions, contact details and finally, a statement highlighting their anonymity and their right to withdraw at any time.

The questionnaire will be completed by the parent/carer concerning the whole family's eating habits. A broad series of questions will be asked including where the family eat, how often they eat, distractions whilst eating and the types of foods they eat. Some of the questions will have closed answers, whilst other questions will enable open-ended answers. The questionnaires will be available in an electronic and paper format and will be completed by the participant in their own environment.

Before conducting the interviews, participants would receive information on what to expect during the interview and that it would be recorded to enable accurate answers to be noted. The participant would be reassured that the recording would be destroyed after the answers had been transcribed. As well, a rapport will be built with the participant to enable them to be comfortable with the process. Interviews will be conducted face-to-face in a safe environment such as the participant's home. The procedure is expected to last around 30-35 minutes. There will also be time for any questions the participant may have before or after the interview.

Four participants will be given a blank food diary and asked to record what themselves and one of their children eat for their main meals, snacks and beverages over a 7-day period. They will be asked to record the food as accurately as possible using handy measures.

Data Analysis

The raw data that will be accumulated from the questionnaire will be analysed using the SPSS Statistics (2013) software. A Chi-squared test will then be used to determine the independence of the data from SPSS (Plackett, 1983). This test could be used to check for any correlation between various answers. For example, individuals that frequently eat fast foods or take-aways may be consuming less fruit and vegetables, however large amounts of unhealthy snacks may be consumed.

NVivo (2010) will be used to transcribe and analyse the data from the interviews. As the interviews are semi-structured, the results will be arranged under headings to enable the responses to be in an orderly form. From there, thematic analysis will examine the themes and enable possible comparisons between the participants to be made.

The data from the food diaries will be entered into the nutritional software, Nutritics (2017).

Once analysed, the nutrients consumed by the individuals will be compared to the UK recommended guidelines, this will determine whether their diet is sufficient. Comparisons will

also be made to identify whether the parent is eating healthier foods than the child or vice versa.

Ethical Considerations

In this study the participants obtained will be over the age of 18 and not classed as vulnerable.

Each method that will be used to collect information will be thoroughly explained to the participants and if for any reason the participant does not understand, they will be provided with contact details of the researcher to discuss further. If the participants are not happy to continue with the study, they can withdraw at any time, without giving a reason. The questionnaire and food diary will be completed in the participants own time and chosen environment. The interview's will take place in an environment that the participant is comfortable in. The researcher will ensure that the process is carried out in a professional, nonjudgemental manner.

Dissertation Timetable for Completion

Omitted from this example.

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