

YOUNG PERSONS' ATTITUDES RELATED TO HEALTHY NUTRITION

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ABSTRACT

In Hungary nutrition plays a determining role in the development of the most serious chronic illnesses. In the past years we made a questionnaire survey about high school students' dietary habits. The results justify that there would be need for further, more efficient work. That is why we proposed to ourselves to reveal the knowledge and habits of the young persons living in Trans-Danubia and to find more suitable ways to arouse their interest. In this study we carried out two focus group discussions in Kaposvár, Keszthely and Győr. As a summary of the focus group discussions' results it can be said that young persons have more and more information about healthy nutrition, but this knowledge is not enough. Children are aware of the reasons why it is necessary, but their dining could be influenced mostly by their parents. Parents and children should be shown that healthy nutrition does not mean resignation from delicious foods, while on the one hand, everything can be eaten, only the measure has to be allocated well, on the other hand, healthy foods are delicious as well, and their preparation is, in most cases, not more time-consuming than any other meal's.

Keywords: nutrition, dietary habits, health, focus group, students

INTRODUCTION

Our attitude towards food has changed a lot for some time. Thinness became a model to follow in the 18th and 19th Centuries and started to spread in Europe at the beginning of the 20th Century. Earlier fatness was considered to be a sign of richness. However, history left deep traces, we could hardly resist the excessive consumption because starvation was typical of the humanity through the millennium. Based on this, deficiency diseases were and are replaced by illnesses deriving from the excessive consumption (Lelovics, 2005).

In Hungary, nutrition plays a determining role in the development of the most serious chronic illnesses. Illnesses linked to nourishment and lifestyle mean a serious problem. In Hungary half of the total mortality derives from cardiovascular diseases, and a quarter is attributable to malignant tumour illnesses.

As we know, all of these causes of death are being linked to nourishment. According to some researches, the effect of diet is more than 30% in case of cardiovascular illnesses and is beyond 35% in case of malignant tumours (Rodler, 2005). Beside these childhood obesity means an increasingly bigger problem since the major part of obese children remain overweight also as an adult. According to

some researches 17.5 million children under 5 years are overweight in the world. There are twice as many obese children in the USA as in 1980, the number of obese adolescents has tripled since then (*Szakály, 2006*).

In the latter years we made a questionnaire survey about high school students' dietary habits. The results justify that there would be need for further, more efficient work. That is why we proposed to ourselves to reveal the knowledge and habits of the young persons living in the Trans-Danubian Region and to find more suitable ways to arouse their interest.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

As the first step of the work we expanded the target group with the group of pupils from 5 to 8 forms in elementary schools, and applied a qualitative market research method using the results of the work done already. This is a procedure with discovery character based on a little sample. Within the method we considered focus group discussions belonging to the direct research procedures to be the most suitable one. Kaposvár, Keszthely and Győr were chosen as test cities to the completion of the survey. Two focus group discussions were prepared in each town, with one high-school group and one elementary school group. There were 8 persons in each focus group, conversations were recorded with a Dictaphone. Students were chosen for the discussion with a screening questionnaire so that we could ensure the homogeneity of the groups. Participants considered the importance of healthy nourishment approximately equally, however, the measure of the importance was different in each city. In Kaposvár those students were chosen who consider healthy nutrition important or very important. Participants in Keszthely considered this to be important or meanly important, while pupils in Győr thought that healthy nutrition is meanly or poorly important. It was stated with the help of a screening questionnaire according to school-type marks, so the importance of healthy nutrition got 4 or 5 in Kaposvár, 3 or 4 in Keszthely while 2 or 3 by most respondent in Győr. Since part of the talks was carried out with elementary school students, taking earlier experiences into consideration, a script with playful character was applied. This method helped to involve the students into conversation, the younger ones took part in the discussion more easily and their interest could be aroused.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Association technique

The first game was an association game, with these words: nutrition, sport, friends, health, diet, internet, fast food restaurant and calorie. As a summary of the game's results it can be said that after hearing the word "health" there were students in all groups who responded: lifestyle, nutrition, doing sport. After mentioning diet, the majority thought of fruit and vegetables or exercise, but in those groups where students thought healthy nutrition to be less important, pills, chemicals were also mentioned. It can be said that those participants who consider healthy nourishment

to be more important thought rather of healthier ways of losing weight than those who consider the question to be less important. After hearing the word “calorie”, the most common answers were obesity, fat, fatty foods, however, the more children thought that healthy nourishment was not important, the more often it turned out that the respondents did not know what this word meant. In Keszthely we got one, while in Győr 3 such answers.

Healthy nutrition and related knowledge

Examining this topic, we were curious about the quantity and quality of young persons' information related to healthy nutrition, as well as what they think about this and their own meal. We considered it to be important to ask where their knowledge about nourishment originated from and which mediators are the most authentic ones in their opinion. To lead up the topic, we held a sandwich eater competition, the winner of which was that student who ate the sandwich last, since he chewed the food best. After that we asked the participants what kind of general rules are known apart from this. Most rules were listed without help in Kaposvár, these were the following:

- Lots of fruits and vegetables are recommended to consume,
- We should prefer dining 5 times a day,
- Using less fat ,
- Visiting fast-food restaurants rarely,
- Not eating late in the evening, possibly after 6 pm,
- Breakfast cannot be left out,
- Consuming 2-3 liter of liquid a day,
- Avoiding refreshers with sugar,
- Avoiding coffee and alcohol.

Groups in Keszthely and Győr could list fewer things without help, but when helped with questions they could answer as well.

In the next game the task was to finish sentences started by us. The first sentence started with: „Healthy nourishment is for me...”. Students expressed the importance of healthy nutrition here; results were already presented in part „Materials and methods”.

The second sentence examined was: “why is healthy nutrition important?”. In this case the answers of the majority of the young people were connected with health, physique, psychological factors and looks (for example live longer, do not get fat). It can be stated that the participants are aware of why healthy nourishment is important, even when they do not consider it fairly important.

The next sentence started with: ”My knowledge about healthy nourishment...”. The students thought mainly of the quantity of information. It is interesting to note that the less important participants consider healthy nourishment, the more they thought they had enough information about the topic. However, when asked to rank the quantity of information they have with school marks, they gave significantly lower values than those who consider healthy nutrition important or very important.

The fourth sentence examined the source of information related to healthy nutrition. We were curious about where the young persons turn if topic-related

questions arise. The most common answer was that they look for it on the internet. Asking a member of family was chosen more often by those who consider healthy nutrition to be more important. The less important this question was, the more common the answers were “looking for it on the internet” and “asking a doctor”. Maybe this is because children who think that healthy nourishment is important see a good example at home in a bigger proportion so they trust in their parents' knowledge and decision.

The last sentence to complete looked for an answer to the young persons' opinions about what their health conditions depend on. Most of them thought that their nourishment influences their health primarily. The second common answer was exercise, and it was followed by lifestyle, weight, spiritual balance and environment. Based on all these it can be stated that the participants are aware of the factors influencing their health, even though some of them do not pay proper attention to them.

After completing the sentences we were curious about how students feed compared with their knowledge. Therefore they were asked to rank the salubrity of their own nurture with school marks. Those who consider healthy nutrition more important gave higher grades to their own nutrition, too. However, it is interesting that very few children answered that they feed according to their knowledge. We tried to find out what the reason is for this difference. According to the students it can be just laziness or an effect of their surroundings. The majority eat what the persons in their surroundings eat or what they see. Further reasons were the lack of willpower and the difficulty in keeping the rules, while according to the majority healthy nutrition is less delicious and more time-consuming. Divers of them believe that healthy nourishment is more expensive, too, and many of them dine in the school or student hostel, so they eat what they get there. Those who dine at home often eat lunch late in the afternoon. Very many people think that they do not get up in the morning earlier in order to have breakfast. There was an opinion according to which people eat more in the evening because the mother cooks and family are together at this time. Some of them mentioned as a reason that there are many foods that are said to be healthy, but they do not like, for example fruit, vegetables.

After this we looked for the answer to what could be the factors that persuade students to change their nurture. Most of them set out two reasons: if they were ill and if their environment changed their nutrition and lifestyle. A further idea was that temptation should be abolished or less healthy foods should be more expensive. It is interesting that the majority of the children said that they would eat less candy if their parents did not buy it, since their pocket money is spent on things like this very rarely.

Talking about information again, very few students said that they did not need more information and they were provided with enough information at school. Not surprisingly, these few students belonged to those who consider healthy nutrition to be less important. Most participants think, however, that this topic has to be talked about, because they can learn only this way. After that they were asked their opinion about who could mediate information authentically to them. Television and papers were considered less authentic, since “everything is about money here”.

They pay attention mostly to doctors, nurses and parents and they are considered the most authentic. Some students named even their trainers and teachers.

In the course of the last game linked to the topic a picture was given to the participants. An angel and a devil could be seen on it trying to persuade a boy to choose between an apple or ice-cream. With this task we tried to reveal the pros and cons about healthy nutrition. The received arguments are summarized in *Table 1*.

Table 1

Argument for and against healthy nutrition according to the young persons

Pros	Cons
<p><i>I think apple...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - is full of vitamins - is delicious - is fresh - is nice - is natural - is good to your teeth - is not fattening - helps to prevent illnesses - extinguishes the thirst - is juicy - gives you energy - You can be ill because of ice-cream - All models and stars dine healthily 	<p><i>I think ice-cream is...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - more delicious - cheaper - not sprinkled - colder - fresher - cooler - sweet - diversified - There is no worm in it - You can prepare it on your own - There is fruity one as well - More people like it - You do not have to be good all the time - You can be more popular - Enjoy the life - Do not be exemplary

As it can be seen from the answers, ice-cream – which symbolizes unhealthy nutrition in this task – is considered to be cool, a kind of rebellion saying you do not have to be good all the time. Enjoy the life! Besides these things already mentioned they stated again: it is cheaper, more delicious and easy to obtain.

“Angels” were able to bring up several good arguments in favour of the apple, which symbolized healthy lifestyle as well. However, fashion which may not be missing from young persons life comes up here, too: “All models and stars dine healthily”.

Viewpoints of food selection

The aim of this part of discussion was to reveal decision viewpoints based on which students opt for a kind of food and reject another one. It had 3 parts: first, we asked participants to collect viewpoints they consider when making a decision. Next, these viewpoints had to be divided into two groups: important and not so important. Things in the important group were divided into further important and less important groups till 3 viewpoints remained on the table. Finally, these also had to be put in order. Some viewpoints were granted as help, these were the following: flavour, scent, looks, healthy,

my friends like it as well, can be shared, well-known, cheap, calorie-content, vitamin-content, fat-content. Besides these viewpoints students listed the following: content, place of origin, E-numbers, quality keeping time, quality. *Table 2* shows the results:

Table 2

Viewpoints of food choice

Viewpoint of choice	KAPOSVÁR		KESZTHELY		GYŐR	
	Elementary school	Secondary school	Elementary school	Secondary school	Elementary school	Secondary school
1.	Quality conservation time	Quality conservation time	Flavour	Cheap	Quality conservation time	Quality conservation time
2.	Quality	Healthy	Healthy	Quality conservation time	Healthy	Flavour
3.	Content	Flavour	Fat-content	Looks	Vitamin-content	Quality

After reviewing the results of the table it can be stated that those two groups that considered healthy nutrition important or very important took food quality and content into account as the most important things in food choice as well. For the rest of the groups delight value, like flavour and looks are more important, except for the primary school group in Győr.

CONCLUSIONS

As a summary of the focus group discussions' results it can be said that young persons have more and more information about healthy nutrition, but this knowledge is not enough, for many reasons. On the one hand, because the importance of this question is not built in the everyday of the students so far, on the other hand, because the majority of the participants still think that this topic has to be talked about, their knowledge can be expanded. The work started by health educators is on its way, development can be seen in the students' knowledge, but the realization of this knowledge and achieving a change in their dining claims further efforts. In our opinion the most suitable way of this could be if parents started the change. Children are aware of the reasons why it is necessary, but their dining could be influenced mostly by their parents. We consider that it is crucial for this to survey the parents' knowledge and to expand it if necessary, while we think that parents do everything for their child's health. All this could be solved at parents' meetings in schools, and already in kindergartens, too. Parents and children should be shown that healthy nutrition does not mean resignation from delicious foods, that on the one hand, everything can be eaten, only the measure has to be allocated well, and that on the other hand, healthy foods are delicious as well, and their preparation is in most cases not more time-consuming than any other meal's.

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