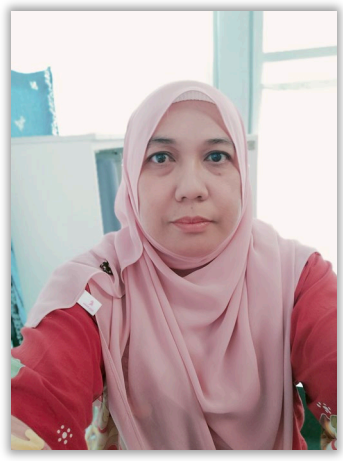
EP024

What Fruits and Vegetables Do Adolescents Prefer? Insights from Sticky Note–Based Focus Group Discussions

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Introduction

- Adolescence represents a critical developmental period for establishing lifelong dietary behaviours, yet fruit and vegetable (FV) intake remains consistently below recommended levels worldwide.
- Inadequate FV intake contributes substantially to micronutrient deficiencies and increases the long-term risk of cardiovascular diseases, type 2 diabetes, certain cancers, and other non-communicable diseases.
- Adolescents face distinct barriers to adequate FV intake, including taste preferences, peer norms, limited autonomy over food purchasing, school food environments, and socioeconomic constraints, highlighting the need for targeted strategies.
- This study addresses the gap in understanding adolescents' fruit and vegetable preferences and the behavioural factors influencing their consumption to inform more effective, context-specific interventions.

Objectives

- This study explored adolescents' preferred fruits and vegetables and identified personal, social, and environmental influences affecting their consumption.

Methodology

- Qualitative study – Focus group Discussion – Use **sticky notes** to minimise peer conformity.
- 13 sessions – 96 informants.
- 8 secondary schools in Selangor were randomly selected.
- Recruited participants using purposive sampling guided by gender and age matrices.
- Data analysis - integrating deductive and inductive coding with constructs from Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) and the Social Ecological Model (SEM).
- Organise data using ATLAS.ti version 25.

Results

10 most preferred types of **fruits:**

- Watermelon
- Apple
- Mango
- Banana
- Grapes
- Orange
- Guava
- Dragon fruit
- Mangosteen
- Durian

Less than one-fifth of participants eat all type of fruit.

Factor

Fruit
Physical enviroment
Availability at home
Social environment
Parents
Family members
Teacher
Personal
Health benefit
Taste preferences
Image
Self motivation

Vegetables
Social environment
Parents
Family members
Influencer
Teacher
Friends
Personal
Health benefit
Image
Self motivation
Taste preferences

10 most preferred types of **vegetables:**

- Carrot
- Spinach
- Water spinach
- Cabbage
- Lettuce
- Cucumber
- Broccoli
- Mustard greens
- Tomato
- Fern shoots

Five informants did not consume vegetables.

Discussion

Adolescents demonstrated clear preference patterns, favouring sweet, familiar, and easy-to-consume fruits, whereas vegetable choices were more closely linked to foods commonly prepared and integrated into daily meals. Guided by the Social Cognitive Theory and Social Ecological Model, the findings indicate that factors influencing fruit and vegetable intake differ. For fruits, taste preference emerged as a dominant driver, alongside perceived health benefits, reflecting the role of immediate sensory reward and positive outcome expectations. In contrast, vegetable consumption was less driven by taste and more dependent on external factors, particularly food preparation and environmental context. Across both food groups, personal factors remained the most influential overall.

Conclusion

Fruit consumption is largely driven by sensory appeal, whereas vegetable intake depends more on environmental and social influences. From a Behavioural Insights perspective, parental encouragement and home availability act as key nudges shaping adolescents' choices. Therefore, interventions should leverage behavioural strategies enhancing accessibility, improving sensory appeal (especially for vegetables), and reinforcing family-based social norms to promote healthier eating behaviours.

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