


Abstract

Negative Dietary Practices among 7-Year-Old Schoolchildren in Bulgaria [†]

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[†] Presented at the 14th European Nutrition Conference FENS 2023, Belgrade, Serbia, 14–17 November 2023.

Abstract: Background and objectives: Maintaining a balanced diet and regular exercise is especially important for first graders. Poor nutrition compromises the quality of life, school attainment, and growth and sets suboptimal dietary habits later in life. The aim of the present study is to assess negative dietary practices among first graders in Bulgaria. Methods: A cross-sectional survey of a nationally representative sample of 3051 7-year-old students was conducted in 2019. The research was carried out in strict compliance with the protocol developed by the WHO (World Health Organization) as part of the WHO European Childhood Obesity Surveillance Initiative (COSI). As part of the study, a questionnaire was presented to the families of the first graders to assess the frequency of food consumption by the children. Results: A quarter (25.3%) of the students did not consume breakfast on a daily basis. The majority did not eat fresh fruits (62.9%) and vegetables every day, excluding potatoes (66.3%). Furthermore, 18% of the children consumed dairy products less than once a week or never. Additionally, 14.8% had fruit juice every day. One-fifth (19.7%) of the students drank soft drinks most of the days or every day of the week (>4 days/week). Many children never consumed or consumed less than once a week protein-rich foods like meat (8.9%), fish (62.3%), eggs (26.4%), and legumes (25.9%). Most days or every day of the week (>4 days/week), a quarter (24.2%) of the children had salty snacks like chips, and half of them (49.7%) had sweet snacks like candies and cakes. Discussion: The results of the present study clearly demonstrate a suboptimal dietary model for first graders in Bulgaria. Only one-third of the children consumed fresh fruits and vegetables daily. The frequency of intake of soft drinks and salty and sweet snacks is too high. The frequency of consumption of protein-rich foods like fish, eggs, and legumes is suboptimal. First graders should become a special target group for policymakers in Bulgaria.

Keywords: dietary practices; schoolchildren



Citation: Duleva, V.; Chikova-Iscener, E.; Rangelova, L.; Dimitrov, P. Negative Dietary Practices among 7-Year-Old Schoolchildren in Bulgaria. *Proceedings* **2023**, *91*, 416. <https://doi.org/10.3390/proceedings2023091416>

Academic Editors: Sladjana Sobajic and Philip Calder

Published: 18 March 2024



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Author Contributions: Conceptualization, V.D. and E.C.-I.; methodology, P.D.; software, E.C.-I.; validation, V.D., L.R. and P.D.; formal analysis, V.D.; investigation, E.C.-I.; resources, P.D.; data curation, L.R.; writing—original draft preparation, E.C.-I.; writing—review and editing, V.D., L.R. and P.D.; visualization, E.C.-I.; supervision, V.D.; project administration, V.D.; funding acquisition, V.D. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, and approved by the or Ethics Committee of NATIONAL CENTER OF PUBLIC HEALTH AND ANALYSES (protocol code and 21.03.2023).

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study through the use of passive approach—only the subjects who didn't want to participate had to sign and return the informed consent form.

Data Availability Statement: The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors on request.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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