



Breakfast Eating Habits Among Schoolchildren



Mohammed ALBashtawy, PhD, MPH, RN, Associate Professor, Dean of Faculty of Nursing, Al al-Bayt University

Al-Mafraq 25113, P.O.Box: 130040, Jordan

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ABSTRACT

Background: A healthy breakfast provides school-age children with the essential nutrients needed for their activities and is correlated with improving a person's general nutritional status.

Methods: A cross-sectional study was conducted over a period of two months in 2015, involving 1798 Jordanian schoolchildren from grade 1 to grade 6. The study data sheet covered the breakfast habits of those children. Descriptive measures and Pearson's chi-square test were computed. Multivariate regression was calculated to assess the predictors' factors for breakfast consumption. The p value was considered significant at $p < 0.05$.

Results: Findings show a prevalence for breakfast consumption of 80.4%. Furthermore, 52.1% of the breakfast eaters indicated that it was a family habit; half of them ate breakfast in order to be active and energetic and to alleviate hunger during the morning. Live with both parents, age groups of 6–9 years and boys were the predictors of breakfast consumption among schoolchildren.

Conclusion: Breakfast skipping among schoolchildren was initially high and increased with age. The findings suggest a community health education programme, conducted by school nurses, nutritionists and other health professionals, is needed.

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Introduction

Breakfast is the first meal consumed during the day. A healthy breakfast provides school-age children with the essential nutrients needed for their activities and is linked to long-term health status throughout life (Kawafha, 2013; Kawafheh, Hamdan, Abozeid, & Nawafleh, 2014; Kleinman et al., 2002). Several studies, conducted both locally and worldwide, (Hoyland, Dye, & Lawton, 2009; Kawafheh et al., 2014; Mhurchu et al., 2010) have demonstrated that skipping breakfast is a public-health issue that affects schoolchildren.

Missing breakfast is associated with many health problems and reduced performance in cognitive and psychosocial functions, as well as academic learning and achievement (Kawafheh et al., 2014; Nakade et al., 2012). Associated nutritional disturbances (i.e., any situation that causes nutritional deficit or imbalance) is reflected in absenteeism from school, doing less work at home and in school, and being apathetic, irritable and lethargic (Kawafha, 2013; Mhurchu et al., 2010; Nakade et al., 2012). Moreover, children who skip breakfast have difficulty concentrating in the afternoon, as well as feeling tired due to reduced energy levels at the end of the day (Kawafheh et al., 2014; Kawafha, 2013; Nakade et al., 2012).

Eating breakfast will provide schoolchildren with a quarter to a third of their recommended daily energy needs (Berkey, Rockett, Gillman, Field, & Colditz, 2003; Nakade et al., 2012). Schoolchildren gain almost

half their weight and bone structure during this period of growth, and 15–20% of their adult height (Berkey et al., 2003; Nakade et al., 2012). A healthy breakfast habit is correlated with improving an individual's general nutritional status (ALBashtawy, 2015; Isaksson et al., 2011; Timlin & Pereira, 2007), with the following advantages: reduced premature mortality and a healthy adulthood; lower plasma cholesterol level; reduced risk of eating disorders especially adolescent bulimia and anorexia nervosa; reduced risk of cardiovascular disease and obesity; decreased likelihood of gastrointestinal disturbance (ALBashtawy, 2015; Isaksson et al., 2011; Timlin & Pereira, 2007; Zeng, Li, Xiong, Su, & Wan, 2011). Moreover, improved alertness, learning and skills during the day (ALBashtawy, 2015; Isaksson et al., 2011; Zeng et al., 2011).

School years are a time of rapid transition, growth and development. Moreover, during this period eating habits are established and influenced by the child's parents, family, peer groups, classmates and teachers (ALBashtawy et al., 2014; Gikas, Riantafillidis, & Perdiki, 2003). This period can play a crucial role in adopting and practicing new healthy, or unhealthy eating habits, because most children try to seek independence and become less reliant on their parents or caregivers in all aspects of the lives (ALBashtawy, Batiha, Tawalbeh, Tubaishat, & AlAzzam, 2015; ALBashtawy et al., 2014; ALBashtawy, 2012; Khamaiseh & ALBashtawy, 2013; Haddad, Owies, & Mansour, 2009).

Parents and caregivers are in prime position to establish a healthy model for their children by helping them to eat a healthy diet (ALBashtawy, 2015; Cheng, Tse, Yu, & Griffiths, 2008). As such they need to understand their children's meal acceptance patterns in order

E-mail address: Mohammadbash@aabu.edu.jo.

to influence their food preferences by enhancing their knowledge, attitudes, and practices toward healthy eating habits (ALBashtawy, 2015; Isaksson et al., 2011; Timlin & Pereira, 2007). Several studies have shown that breakfast habits and eating behaviours tend to be learned (ALBashtawy, 2015; Cheng et al., 2008). Furthermore, attitudes regarding eating are developed early and are likely to remain for a lifetime (ALBashtawy, 2015; Cheng et al., 2008).

In Jordanian schools, there are no special programmes that offer breakfast to the pupils, and no free or reduced-cost meals are provided. The school day in most Jordanian public schools is from 8 am to 2 pm, and pupils are allowed to eat their breakfast during a 30-minute break, from 10.30 am, in the school yards or in their classrooms. They bring their breakfast from home or buy it from the school canteen, which chiefly offers sandwiches, beverages, biscuits and doughnuts. This current study is the first to investigate the breakfast habits of school-age children in Jordan. Therefore, this research was conducted to assess the breakfast eating habits among Jordan's primary schoolchildren, aged 6–14 years.

Literature Review

Breakfast Eating and Gender

Many studies have been conducted to examine breakfast skipping among schoolchildren. Several of studies indicate that breakfast skipping appeared greater among girls than boys (Buxton, 2014; Haddad et al., 2009; Kawafha, 2013; Juan et al., 2013); in contrast, other studies showed no differences between boys and girls (ALBashtawy, 2015; Nakade et al., 2012; Yahia, Achkar, Abdallah, & Rizk, 2008). This variation and inconsistencies between boys and girls may be explained by different culture, age groups, race and variety of studies designs (ALBashtawy, 2015; Mullan & Singh, 2010).

Breakfast Eating and Social Habits

The social habits of breakfast consumption is an important daily event which can affect the probability and frequency of increasing or decreasing the prevalence of eating breakfast. Michelson (1999), in the USA, found that 81.4% of breakfast eaters prepared their own meal. Moreover, Paxson and Schady (2007), in Ecuador, stated that children are more active in food purchasing and preparation when they belong to a single-parent family or when their parents go to work earlier; that is, before their child's breakfast time. Levin, Kirby, and Currie (2012), in Scotland, discussed this phenomenon and found that breakfast consumption occurred less frequently when eaten alone and with no participation from the family.

Several studies show that family meals, such as breakfast, have many advantages for both family and children. Such occasions serve to improve the diets of schoolchildren. They become daily rituals and routines and children become more likely to eat other family meals, like lunch and dinner (ALBashtawy, 2015; Isaksson et al., 2011; Timlin & Pereira, 2007). Mealtimes facilitate positive relationships and face-to-face communication patterns between parents or caregivers and their children, thereby improving the psychological health of all members of the family, strengthening the family's identity and connectedness and reinforcing parental roles (Christensen, 2004; Sen, 2010).

Schoolchildren appear to have many excuses and reasons for skipping breakfast (ALBashtawy, 2015; Isaksson et al., 2011). According to Bagwell (2000), most of the breakfast skippers are busy until late into the night, with variety of interest; for example, school, and extracurricular activities, watching TV and playing games. They go to bed late most of the time, get up in a hurry and then rush off to school; as a result, breakfast is missed (Bagwell, 2000).

Theoretical Framework

The Pender's Health Promotion Model (HPM) was considered as a theoretical framework for this study. The HPM determines person's age, gender, level of education, social support, skills, knowledge, personality and characteristics as key determinants of health-promoting behaviours. This theoretical framework proposes that individuals are more likely to connect, continue and engage in health-promoting behaviours when other persons support their behaviours (Dehdari, Rahimi, Aryaiean, & Gohari, 2014; Pender, Murdaugh, & Parsons, 2011). Moreover, families, teachers, classmates, peers, and health care providers such as physicians and nurses are crucial sources of interpersonal influence that can support and improve adherence to healthy eating behaviours.

The Situation in Jordan

Jordan is an Arab kingdom in Western Asia, with a total population of 9.5 million. The family is the strongest social component and is the basis on which community is built. Furthermore, it serves as the most important unit in which beliefs, values, norms, and customs are shared between members. The average Jordanian household size is 4.8 (Jordan Population and Housing Census, 2015; Shoup, 2007). Currently, nearly a third of Jordan's inhabitants are below the age of 15 (Jordanian Department of Statistics, 2009) and this increases the pressure on health organizations and health providers to make suitable interventions to encourage children's healthy eating habits.

In Jordan, some studies have been conducted to assess breakfast skipping by children and adolescents, showing that the prevalence of such behavior ranged from 20 to 55% (El-Qudah, 2014; Haddad et al., 2009; Kawafheh et al., 2014; Kawafha, 2013).

Research Questions

The current study was conducted to answer these questions:

1. What are the prevalence and frequency of breakfast consumption among primary schoolchildren?
2. What are the habits of breakfast consumption among primary schoolchildren?
3. What are the predictors of breakfast consumption among primary schoolchildren?

Research Design and Sampling

A cross-sectional study was conducted to analyze the data collected from a specific representative subset of schoolchildren, at a specific point in time without manipulating the study environment, over a period of two months (September–November 2014). Participants of the current study were Jordanian primary schoolchildren in grades 1 to grade 6 (6–14 years old), randomly chosen from the 48 primary schools (26 for girls, 22 for boys) located in Mafraq Governorate. Twelve primary schools were selected to participate in the current survey, using a simple random sampling method. All schoolchildren in the selected schools (2225 schoolchildren) were invited to participate in the current study.

G* power software (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007) was used to identify the appropriate sample size for this study, with a confidence interval of 1.96, a margin of error of 5% and the expected prevalence of skipping breakfast 50% among the school students. The minimal effect sample size calculated was 386. Permission was granted by the Ethical Approval Committee of Al al-Bayt University and then obtained from the District Education Office at Mafraq Governorate, and verbally from the administrator of each selected school.

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