

“That’s His Choice Not Mine!” Parents’ Perspectives on Providing a Packed Lunch for Their Children in Primary School

H. Ensaff, PhD^{1,2}; E. Bunting, MSc²; S. O’Mahony, BSc³

ABSTRACT

Objective: To examine factors influencing parents’ selection of packed lunches over a school lunch, their choices in food preparation, and the role of children within these.

Design: A qualitative approach using semistructured focus group and individual interviews.

Setting: Four primary schools in a UK local authority.

Participants: Twenty parents providing a packed lunch for their children (aged 5–11 years).

Analysis: An inductive thematic approach was used to identify categories and themes. The researchers maintained rigor in the data analysis through internal discussion and review until consensus was reached.

Results: Children emerged as active decision makers exerting substantial power particularly in the initial decision to have a packed lunch, and then in influencing the lunch’s contents. The packed lunch could be a source of anxiety for some parents; however, ultimately parents’ attitudes and perceptions revolved around the key requirement that the lunch was eaten. Providing a packed lunch was a means of achieving this.

Conclusions: This study highlights children’s growing authority over everyday food decisions. Further research is needed to explore children’s perceptions of their role in food provision. The study’s findings have implications for school food, nutrition education, and school-based interventions. Frameworks that look to improve children’s nutrition in this area should reflect children’s growing status as food decision makers and consider how this can be employed to support and sustain positive changes.

Key Words: children, food choice, parents, school nutrition (*J Nutr Educ Behav.* 2018;50:357–364.)

Accepted December 17, 2017.

INTRODUCTION

Children spend a large proportion of their year in school, and a packed lunch brought from home is preferred by many UK children.¹ As well as contributing an important element to a pupil’s diet, packed lunches can represent overall diet and food provision available at home. Studies^{2–5} have raised concerns regarding the nutritional quality of packed lunches, as has

a government-commissioned review of school food (School Food Plan).⁶ Strategies to improve the quality of packed lunches are gaining momentum at the school and local government levels. Many UK primary schools implement packed lunch policies. These guidelines vary among schools but generally outline suggestions to parents and encourage the exclusion of chocolate, potato chips, and sugar-sweetened beverages.

For pupils, the alternative to bringing a packed lunch from home is to eat a school lunch (also known as a school dinner), which is provided by school caterers. Typically, this is composed of a hot meal (meat-based or vegetarian, or a baked potato with a filling) or a sandwich, as well as a drink and dessert or pudding. School lunches are subject to school food standards,⁷ which restrict the food and drinks provided. These standards were reviewed as part of the national School Food Plan,⁶ and the revised standards became statutory in England at the beginning of 2015. The price of a school lunch in England ranges from £1 to £3, with an average of £2.04¹ (approximately \$2.53 USD); children from low-income families are eligible to receive free school lunches under the *Free School Meal* (FSM) program.

In addition, in September, 2014, the UK government introduced a *Universal Infant Free School Meal* (UIFSM) program that offered a free school lunch to all pupils aged 4–7 years.⁸

¹School of Food Science and Nutrition, University of Leeds, Leeds, UK

²Department of Nutrition and Dietetics, Leeds Beckett University, Leeds, UK

³Health and Wellbeing Service, Children and Families Service, Leeds City Council, Leeds, UK

Conflict of Interest Disclosure: The authors’ conflict of interest disclosures can be found online with this article on www.jneb.org.

Address for correspondence: H. Ensaff, PhD, School of Food Science and Nutrition, University of Leeds, Leeds LS2 9JT, UK; Phone: +44(0) 113 343 3418; Fax: +44 (0)113 343 2982; E-mail: h.ensaff@gmail.com

© 2018 Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior. Published by Elsevier, Inc. All rights reserved.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jneb.2017.12.008>

One aspiration behind this initiative was to encourage the uptake of school lunches as an alternative to packed lunches. Schools are increasingly used in public health interventions, especially regarding diet and obesity prevention. Accomplishing this via schools can be limited, and therefore engagement with parents' perspectives in food provision is critical.

Parents have a key role as nutritional gatekeepers for their children, influencing the provision of food both inside and outside the home. Parents act as critical moderators of food in the home⁹ and the influences on children's healthy eating behavior of a positive home food environment, maternal diet quality, and parents' food practice were reported.¹⁰⁻¹² The difficulties that parents face in promoting healthy eating practices at home and the strategies that they implement were also reported.¹³ Previous work indicated parents' desire to have control over their children's diet at school¹⁴ and their ability to predict their likes and dislikes accurately.¹⁵

There is limited research on packed lunches from parents' perspectives, and although previous research found a strong preference for packed lunches and emphasized their social aspects for children,⁹ a greater understanding of parents' perceptions is critical. This is particularly the case given the current drive by local government and schools to improve the quality of the foods provided by parents in packed lunches.

In considering parents' perceptions and practices related to packed lunches and the primary theoretical considerations of food provision by parents, parent-child interactions, and school settings, the socioecological model¹⁶ highlights the complex relationship between individuals and the environment, in which behavior is influenced by multiple levels,¹⁶ some proximal and others more distal. The inner level of influence captures the individual's setting and interactions with those who are closest, eg, with parents, family members, and peers. The next level of influence is composed of interactions among components, eg, parents, the school community, and packed lunch policies. More distal factors are composed of settings that have indirect contact yet influence, eg, parents' work pat-

terns, as well as the social and cultural values and customs exerting influence. Reciprocal determinism is relevant to the socioecological model, in which environment and behavior influence each other and the individual can also influence environment, eg, home food environment. The socioecological model was previously used to consider dietary behavior including obesogenic dietary intake in young children,¹⁷ fruit and vegetable intake in a preschool setting,¹⁸ and maternal considerations regarding how much food to offer children.¹⁹ Reciprocal determinism also forms the central principle of Social Cognitive Theory, which emphasizes interactions among the individual, environmental influences, and behavior.^{20,21} Social Cognitive Theory has been widely used to examine nutrition behavior, including fruit and vegetable intake in children,²² farm-to-school programs,²³ and parental attitudes and barriers to healthy eating.²⁴ Other work focused on modeling and control theories of parental influence; it revealed that children modeled parents' eating behavior and attitudes, as well as the role of control, eg, parents imposing control over food or using food in an attempt to control behavior.²⁵

Given the paucity of studies examining parents' perspectives with respect to packed lunches, this study sought to explore parents' perceptions and practices related to packed lunches, their experience of providing a packed lunch, and the role of children in these. More specifically, factors relevant to the decision to opt for a packed lunch (as opposed to a school meal) and the choice of items included were central to this work. The study was informed by theory the researchers considered most relevant; in particular, it was guided by socioecological theory.¹⁶

METHODS

Because of the exploratory nature of the study, a qualitative approach using an inductive thematic methodology²⁶ was considered most appropriate. Focus group interviews were selected to promote discussion among parents and to gain an understanding of contrasting viewpoints, ie, to benefit from the group effect.²⁷ Groups were limited

to 5 participants, to encourage in-depth discussion leading to more relevant and interesting data.²⁸ Although focus group discussions were the primary interviewing method, if a parent had difficulty attending, the researchers offered and conducted an individual interview. The latter afforded detailed insight into parents' experiences of providing a packed lunch, and a deeper understanding of their attitudes and behavior. To support consistency across individual and focus group interviews, both were based on the same semistructured interview format and guided by the same interview guide. Data collection was conducted until saturation was considered to be reached and no new relevant information emerged, with themes and categories well-defined.²⁹ Four focus groups (12 parents) and 8 individual interviews (8 parents) were held. All were conducted in English and audio recorded after the researchers obtained informed consent; they took place from October, 2014 to November, 2015; the majority lasted 50–60 minutes.

Participants and Recruitment

The researchers took a pragmatic approach to recruit parents via their children's school, with a key requirement that parents provided a packed lunch for their children on most days of a typical week. Primary schools within an urban local authority formed the sampling frame for this study. To enhance the generalizability of the work, a strategy of sampling was adopted based on the FSM profile. This is the percentage of pupils eligible for FSM, which is a means-tested entitlement and is used as a measure of socioeconomic disadvantage. Accordingly, primary schools were approached in sequential order based on their FSM profile and their closeness to the national average (17.0%).³⁰ Initial contact was made via telephone and e-mail; this was followed by a school visit and face-to-face discussion with the head teacher or other senior leader with specific responsibility for school food. For consenting schools, an information pack was sent home with pupils to all parents, outlining the study and inviting parents

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6843543>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6843543>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)