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Executive summary

The objective of the WP6 was to study the role of psychosocial influences (social context, parents, other caregivers, siblings and peers) on children's eating behaviour. In this deliverable, four papers published in different journals have been selected to illustrate a systemic approach of social influences on different facets of children's eating behaviors.

The first paper examined the impact of an unseeing context, the lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic, on the parental feeding practices as well as on children's eating behaviors. More specifically, the COVID-19 pandemic caused France to impose a strict lockdown, affecting families' habits in many domains. The study evaluated possible changes in child eating behaviors, parental feeding practices, and parental motivations when buying food during the lockdown, compared to the period before the lockdown. Parents of 498 children aged 3-12 years (238 boys) completed an online survey with items from validated questionnaires. They reported on their (child's) current situation during the lockdown, and retrospectively on the period before the lockdown. Many parents reported changes in child eating behaviors, feeding practices, and food shopping motivations. When changes occurred, child appetite, food enjoyment, food responsiveness and emotional overeating significantly increased during the lockdown. Increased child boredom significantly predicted increased food responsiveness, emotional overeating and snack frequency in between meals. When parents changed their practices, they generally became more permissive: less rules, more soothing with food, more child autonomy. They bought pleasurable and sustainable foods more frequently, prepared more home-cooked meals and cooked more with the child. Level of education and increased stress level predicted changes in parental practices and motivations. This study provides insights in factors that can induce positive and negative changes in families' eating, feeding and cooking behaviors. This can stimulate future studies and interventions.

Reference: Philippe, K., Chabanet, C., Issanchou, S., & Monnery-Patris, S. (2021). Child eating behaviors, parental feeding practices and food shopping motivations during the COVID-19 lockdown in France:(How) did they change? *Appetite*, 161, 105132. doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2021.105132

The second selected paper assessed another source of psychosocial influences: the influence of peers. More precisely, the objective of the study was to examine key underlying mechanisms for peer-related social influence on preadolescents' healthy eating behavior by including factors closely linked with the quality of preadolescents' relationship with peers. A cross-sectional study was conducted in a convenience sample of 278 Lithuanian preadolescents, recruited from a public school. A questionnaire containing sociodemographic questions, questions about food intake, peer-related social norms of healthy eating, social self-efficacy, vegetable preference, need for peer approval and feeling of belonging were applied. Data was analysed using structural equation modeling. The results showed that social self-efficacy predicts feeling of belonging to the peer group and need for peer approval. Feeling of belonging and need for peer approval predict actual intake of vegetables via injunctive norms of healthy eating. However, neither feeling of belonging nor need for peer approval predicted descriptive norms of healthy eating. Contrary to our expectations, descriptive norms were found to be unrelated with actual intake of vegetables, though vegetable preference predicted actual intake of vegetables. Vegetable preference was not predicted by injunctive or descriptive peers' social norms of healthy eating. The findings of this study offer insight for informing parents, teachers and for social norms marketing interventions by stressing the importance of social relations when the aim is to encourage healthy eating among preadolescents.





Reference: Ragelienė, T. and A. Grønhøj, (2020) Preadolescents' healthy eating behavior: peeping through the social norms approach. *BMC Public Health*, 20(1): p. 1268. doi:10.1186/s12889-020-09366-1

The third paper focussed on the impact of both maternal and paternal feeding practices on child's eating behaviors. Indeed, past research has mainly focused on the links between child eating behaviors and maternal food practices. The impact of fathers and of concordant/discordant food parenting practices within families has received much less attention. To fill this gap, both parents of 105 French children aged 2.01-6.51 years (54 boys) filled in a survey with items from validated questionnaires. Results showed that fathers and mothers perceived their child's eating behaviors in similar ways, despite mothers taking significantly more meals with their child than fathers. Fathers reported using significantly more pressure to eat and food as reward, but reported lower levels of "family meal setting" than mothers. Moderate to high correlations were observed between mothers' and fathers' feeding practices and styles. Regression analyses showed that both maternal and paternal practices and styles were predictors for child eating behaviors. One interaction effect was observed: in households where both parents used higher levels of pressure to eat, the child showed a significantly lower food enjoyment than expected if the effects were additive. Our findings underline the importance of studying the individual role of each parent in child feeding research and that both parents within families should avoid using coercive practices. This could finally stimulate new interventions and recommendations addressed to both parents.

Reference: Philippe, K., Chabanet, C., Issanchou, S., & Monnery-Patris, S. (2021). Are food parenting practices gendered? Impact of mothers' and fathers' practices on their child's eating behaviors. *Appetite*, 105433. doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2021.105433

Finally, the last selected paper targeted a public health issue underexplored in the scientific literature: psychosocial influences of portion size determination. It is well-known that large portion sizes can make children overeat, alter their self-regulation abilities and induce weight gain. However, little is known about how parents determine portion sizes for their children. Using semi-structured interviews with 5 fathers and 32 mothers of pre-schoolers, this study examined French parents' food portioning practices. The division of responsibility between parent and child in deciding portion sizes was explored, as well as the influencing factors and possible sources of information. Parents described a wide range of practices. For most, determining portion sizes is an intuitive action that depends on habits and mainly arises from experiences with feeding their child and his/her appetitive traits. Few parents grant autonomy to their child for portioning and serving food, especially for the first serving. Many influencing factors were identified, including child-related (e.g., appetite, food preferences), parent-related (e.g., avoiding food waste), and external factors (e.g., influence of siblings, French food culture). Most parents do not search for information/recommendations to guide their practices. Stimulating optimal self-regulation of eating in children is important and parents can play a crucial role in this. This study identified barriers and facilitators to guide parents in providing appropriate portion sizes and help include children in this decision process

Reference: Philippe, K., Issanchou, S., Roger, A., Feyen, V., & Monnery-Patris, S. (2021). How do French parents determine portion sizes for their pre-schooler? A qualitative exploration of the parent-child division of responsibility and influencing factors. *Nutrients*, 13(8), 2769. doi.org/10.3390/nu13082769

