

A Study of School Lunch Habits in Primary School Children during Recess Time

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Abstract

Children are the asset of any nation. These should be take heed very carefully. The paper aims to examine the eating habits of children during recess time in primary schools of Hyderabad, a city of Pakistan. Recess is the crucial time for the healthy development of the school children. Continue teaching and learning process in a particular classroom without taking any food makes the students tired and fatigue which ultimately affects their learning. The main objective of the study was to explore the food items that are mostly taken up by the children during recess time and their reason. For the study, all Government primary schools of Hyderabad city were selected as the population while; convenient method of sampling was used to select the 80 children from 20 selected primary schools. Qualitative method approach was used to collect the data from these students which consist of an interview schedule. The findings show that majority of the students neither eat breakfast at home nor bring food from home to eat during recess time and like to take food from the pushcarts standing inside or the outside the school.

Keywords: School lunch, Recess time, Health, Primary school Children.

Introduction

Children either the boys or a girls are the future and asset of any nation. School going children are indispensable for any society therefore their growth, development and health is very important for the society and community and the nation they belong (Vashisht R.N. et al, 2005). The physical health of these children should be developed very carefully because if a child is physically healthy than automatically he will have the healthy mind. According to Aristotle, a sound body has a sound mind. Nutrition play very important role in building the physic of a child. Children should given such a type of food which helps them in balance development. The age for primary school in Pakistan is in between 5+ and 10+. This is the growing age of the children. Family plays very important role in developing food habit and taste from very beginning of life, but the foundation laid by the child himself for his own health starts from this age. Many food tastes, habits, likes, and dislikes are developed during childhood. Many factors such as family, friends, the media (especially TV) and environment influence their food choices and eating habits. School-age children are often willing to eat a wider variety of foods than their younger siblings

A literature review of dietary habits of the Pakistani and South Asian children revealed that most of the children take excess quantity of the fats than the healthy and balance diet such as milk, fruit and vegetables (Hydrie, et. al., 2004). The cause of malnutrition in children from the developing countries including Pakistan is intake of inappropriate food (Subzwari, Hasnain & Ali, 2009).

In Pakistan, Government primary schools timing ranges between 7:30 am to 1:30 pm. The students are taught for the first 2.30 to 3 hrs in the class room and then have the time for refreshment called recess. Recess in a school is an important part of the school day because this is the time when children have the chance to move from their seats and go out of the class where they play, socialize with friends and eat lunch. either brought from their home or buy from school. This period is for 20 to 30 minutes when children are free to decide on their own what their wish to do is and with whom. This period is very important for children and serves as essential break

from continuous concentration, academic face in the classroom. Most of the Government schools in Hyderabad city do not have their own school canteen with sufficient quantity of food items for their students and the stalls and pushcarts are allowed to sell food items in the school for students and teachers. Most of these pushcarts and stalls sell unhygienic and unhealthy food items. The schools have to put a hard check if they want their children to be healthy. Most of the schools sell following things:

Table 01 Showing Types of Food available in Schools

Item No.	Name of Item
1.	Channa chat
2.	Dahi Bhaley
3.	Samosas
4.	Pakorey
5.	French Fries
6.	Biryani
7.	Pattis
8.	Dal Pakwan
9.	Gola gunda
10.	Falooda
11.	Pop corn
12.	Backed corn
13.	Red potatoes
14.	Biscuits, Toffees and Candies
15.	Burgers

Most of these are unhygienic, rotten and uncovered. The plates and spoons in which these items are served are not washed properly. The quality of oil and other material is also not appropriate.

The school food have a big impact on children's and adolescents' diets, as at this time they consume 19% to 50% of their daily food calories of their total daily calories (Gleason and Suitor 2001). The national School of Health Policies and Programs Study (SHPPS) 2006 (O'Toole et al. 2007) conducted by the Centers for Disease Prevention and Control (CDC) reported that the min schools most common foods sold were higher-fat salty snacks.

Now a day's diet has become major concern for everyone as there have been great changes in diet and its types. The mode of fast food is increasing day by day by replacing traditional food. However, the bulks of children do not come across the suggested criteria of dietary guidelines and are lacking healthy dietary habits. In addition, dietary quality would be exacerbated when children grow up by not only lower consumption of fruits, vegetables, and milk, but also higher consumption of soft drinks. According to British Nutrition Foundation "growth of five to twelve year children is very important because at this age their development is very fast and they are very active. Therefore it is very important to pay proper attention on their health and diet provides to them should have maximum energy and nutrition which is the demand of the age. In relation to the health of children it is important to know the children's eating attitudes and behavior. Because eating habits of children affects their health, cognition level and ultimately their academic achievements. There are evidences which show that eating habits which are developed in childhood continues through to adults. (Kelder *et al.*, 1994; Nicklas, 1995; Steptoe *et al.*, 1995). Several researches show a role of childhood nutrition on adult health (Hales *et al.*, 1991; Moller *et al.*, 1994; Berenson *et al.*, 1998). Attitudes to food and nutrition behaviour are formed from early childhood (Eva Maradova, 2011). Although food habits of individuals are not stable and unchanging, a base for healthy food habits can be created in early childhood (Casey et al., 1989). Along with the family social environment, friends and peer group, school, media and related environment also have effect on the eating habits of the children. The eating habits are already developed when children come to primary schools from these sources (Eva,Maradova, 2011).These habits can promote during the recess time when the friends and the peer group jointly take their food in group. School is the second socializing place in space and time which promote the healthy eating habits among the children (Brito &et.all, 2014).

Significance of the Study

The child of today is the adult of tomorrow, often called nation builder. For the healthy nation of tomorrow, children of today should handle with care. Along with quality education school should care about the quality of food items given during recess time to the young generation of the nation. The study will be helpful to the school administration to provide children healthy food through proper monitoring and evaluation systems on the hand and push cart and stalls. Parents will get awareness about the unhealthy and unhygienic food that their children buy from these stalls and carts. The nation will get healthy youth for its future.

Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study was to evaluate the pattern of eating habits of the primary school children during recess.

- i. To find out the recess time eating habits of the primary school children.
- ii. To assess the reasons for eating pattern of food during recess time.
- iii. To suggest the measure that can help the parents as well administrators to improve children eating habit.

Methodology of the Study

Descriptive research method was used to collect the related data regarding the eating practices and habits of Primary School children. All the Government Primary School children of Hyderabad city (urban areas) constituted the population of the study. 80 children (40 Girl's and 40 Boys') of class four from twenty Primary schools were randomly selected for the study purpose. These children were interviewed by the researchers themselves. A pilot testing from 10 students was carried out to check the validity and appropriation of the schedule, and was counter checked by the senior professors of the education. These children were taken from the study sample group.

Procedure

On the basis of review of related study, an Interview schedule was framed. The interview consisted of two section; section one was based on demographic information of the child containing Name, Father's name, Fathers occupation, Mothers name, Mother's occupation, out of home working hours of mother (if working lady), type of family (single or joint), brother and sisters, is there a maid at home or mother works alone while; the second part was about the food items eaten at the recess time and its reason.

This interview schedule was employed to 10 students (as part of pilot testing) at the initial basis to study the relevancy, appropriateness and assumption of the study. After getting the satisfactory results of the pilot testing the remaining interviews were conducted by recording their responses by all the researchers. These recorded interviews were then converted into written form and then tabulated under the similar themes while the responses which were not matching to them were discussed separately.

Table 02 Showing Breakfast and Lunch Habit of Children

Do you take Breakfast regularly	Once in week 22	Twice 19	Thrice 17	Whole week 12	Never 10
What do you eat in breakfast most of the time?	Tea & Chappati /paratha 26	Butter / Margarine & Bread 15	Milk & Biscuits 12	Egg & paratha 13	Nothing 14
Do you feel hunger in school?	Always 42	Often 11	Some time 13	Never 14	
Do you bring lunch for recess time?	Always 16	Once 23	Twice 18	Thrice 9	Never 14
How much money do you get for daily recess lunch?	More than 10 rupees 38	More than 25 rupees 21	More than 40 rupees 8	More than 50 rupees 4	Nothing 9
Do you spend whole money?	Yes 31	No 11	Some times 27	Never 11	

Table 02 Showing type of food pupils' use during Recess

FOOD ITEM	always	Usually	Sometimes	Never	Not responded
Channa chat	25	17	13	13	12
Dahi Bhaley	27	13	17	12	11
Samosas	9	17	20	22	12
Pakorey	13	18	13	20	16
French Fries	33	12	11	11	13
Biryani	9	24	22	14	11
Pattis	30	21	8	9	12
Dal Pakwan	7	17	27	13	16
Gola gunda	19	11	23	10	17
Falooda	22	21	11	10	16
Pop corn	21	24	16	08	11
Backed corn	20	17	18	17	8
Spicy (Red) potatoes	18	17	17	15	13
Biscuits, Toffees and Candies	09	11	17	29	14
Lemoo pani	12	13	17	24	14

*Not responded column of Item no. 07 represents the leftover (Col. 1+2+3+4+5) – 80 Children from 80.

From the selected sample 10% students (who do not buy and eat lunch from pushcart) as well 10% students (who mostly buy and eat lunch from pushcart) were selected for the Interview Purpose. The purpose of the interview was also to study the reasons of their food habits.

Results of the Interviews

When the children who do not buy and eat food from school were asked the reason not to buy the food, 50% of them replied our parents do not allow and give us pocket money to buy these things, they said that the food items are unhygienic and not clean. By eating these we can become ill. 30% of children said that they do good breakfast and do not feel hunger during school time and the lunch is ready as they get home while 20% of these replied that their parents do not afford to give us pocket money, it is enough that they send us to school.

When the students who bought and ate food from school stalls and pushcarts during recess time were asked the reason for this, 25% of them replied mostly we do not eat breakfast so we feel hunger, and aroma of these foods make our hunger more, also we like and feel happy to buy these foods that is why we eat them. When these children were asked that do you not see that the things sold at push carts and stalls are not covered, flies are sitting on them and also the hands of person selling is dirty, serves in dirty utensils the basic reply was yes we know it but all the children and specially my friends, they take from these stalls and do not become ill or any type of disorder than how can these things become harmful for us?

When these children were asked for not taking breakfast, they answered that our mother has to look after and take care of grandmother, grandfather and all the family members and has no much time / mother also wants to go for job with us / when we get up our mother is not at home and we do not like to eat in the morning. That's the reason she cannot prepare good breakfast and recess lunch for the students. As one of the student said that

“We are never asked for our choice and if we made request for anything she shout on us, as she has to prepare breakfast for elders of the home first.”

Another said that “mother has no time she remain busy with crying younger brother and sisters. We take our self ready and come without breakfast”. There was an interesting answer also,

“ If we do not take any breakfast than our mother give us pocket money and say that eat something from the school in recess and do not live without eating, THAT WE LOVE”.

Do your parents, teachers or lessons in your books do not suggest the bad affects of eating unhygienic food? They replied that yes they all teach us not to eat but we are forced to buy because there is no canteen in our school, my mother do not give lunch box or we cannot go out of the school, also we do not have time to go out to buy; neither in the morning before coming to school nor during recess. We get such money from which we can only buy things inside school campus. My friends and class fellow eat from here.

10% replied that our friends buy and eat and ask us to do so, when we refuse them they say that see these are poor and have no money that's why not taking or eating delicious things that's why we have to buy and eat these things forcedly and also these will be no more our friends. 15% of these children said that our parents do not have money to give every child of them that's the reason they give us tea and chappati in breakfast and lunch at home when go back home.

Findings of the Study

It was found from the study that

- Father's of 20% of primary school children have government job, while 18% doing nothing and their mother work for them. 20% has their own small and big business, 15% work in private organisations while 27% do not know about their father.
- 38% of the students said after finishing work at home their mother go for bread (work), 21% mothers are full time working women while, 22% women are house wife and work at their own home only, remaining 19% did not know about their mother whether she works outside the home or not (they answered that some time she found at home all the day while other time not at all).
- 55% of the students have more than four brother and sister and while 25% have 2 to 3 and 20% are only one child in family.
- Brother and sisters of 57% of children go to school or college, Elder brother / sister of 23% children goes to work and other come to school, 20% have small babies at home.
- Most 51% of the students live in joint family with their grandmother, grandfather and aunty and Uncle. 04% have single parent (either mother or father is died or Divorced), 34% live in single family while 11% did not replied.
- 38% of the students take their breakfast only once a week and that is holiday, 17% takes whole the week while 14% never take their breakfast while other 31% takes twice or thrice.
- Reason of not taking breakfast is varied, 39% joint family where grandfather and grandmothers are superior, 33% get up late in the morning (short of time), 24% Number of brother and sister in family

- and working mother and 4% have nothing at home to eat (poverty).
- Most of the children bring pocket money and buy things from pushcart and stalls because they like it.
- Some of the children even do not like to eat things from these carts and stall in and outside of the school but as they feel hunger and laziness while other children only eat because their friends ask them to eat and have company to them that's the reason they eat from here.

Discussion

Children nutrition is very important for healthy nation builder as well for society. The habits develop in the childhood continue throughout the life. If children have habit of taking junk food right from their childhood can affect their physical, mental and social as well as emotional development. According to Rhode Jon. E., "There is no health without proper nutrition." Food habits like high intake of fats and saturated fat results in different types of the coronary heart diseases, certain cancers, obesity, hypertension and diabetes etc, Frazao, 1998). Schools should sell the quality food for the proper health of the students, because this is the crucial period and the habits developed here hang about all the life in adults and in old age.

School going children are the assets for any nation, their dietary habits should be monitored regularly not only by the family but school also has the same responsibility. The present study was conducted to study the food habits of Government primary school Hyderabad (Morning Shift) children during their school recess time. Literature review shows that majority of the students in Pakistani government schools come without breakfast in schools. Also they do not bring healthy food from their home and their parents do not give them homemade or healthy food to eat during recess time. Most of the students take junk food from school which contains low quality ingredients. The present study also reveals the same findings for nutrition pattern of the children during school recess hours.

Conclusion and Recommendation

It is studied that most of the primary school children do not take breakfast properly and come empty stomach in school. The reasons vary from child to child and family to family. Joint and traditional families have their problems; where the elder ones specially grand mama and grand papas and husbands are more important than the children; working mothers who have to go early on job either in single or the joint family; some have little babies, other give preference to elder brother and sisters who earn for family and few do not have anything to eat for the breakfast, due to poverty. It is also studied that most of the children do not like to eat anything in breakfast; they bring pocket money and buy things from pushcart and stalls because they like it. Some of the children even do not like to eat things from these carts and stall in and outside of the school but due to hunger and laziness they take these food while, other children only eat because their friends ask and force them to eat and have company to them.

Children of any nation build the society. To build a healthy and intelligent society children should be properly trained through quality education, environment and food they take. The education outcomes totally based on the good health of a child and health can be maintained and developed by quality nutrition. Because no health is without good nutrition and no education without good health. A child spends very important quarter of his day in school, there fore

- Importance of quality food and healthy eating habits should be included in curriculum right from elementary school.
- Electronic media should aware and run campaign for the general public by telecasting the condition and environment of the cooking places where the food is prepared and how it is served in the schools.
- The government should provide healthy food in school for all specially for poor and needy children. This will help not only to develop the healthy nation but also in continuation and increase the enrolment of poor children in school.
- The school should make it confirm that the food supplied by the stall and carts is healthy, fresh and energetic. Proper monitoring and evaluation should be kept upon it.
- Parents should ensure that their children are not going empty stomach and taking healthy breakfast on regular basis.
- Parents should give homemade, healthy lunch for recess and if not should check on the food they eat during recess time.

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