

NUTRITIONAL BEHAVIOR OF CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

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The paper summarizes the results of a pilot-study carried out on a sample of children and adolescents from Bucharest school units in order to approach the topic of their health status in the light of those behaviours that lead later to nutrition disorders like obesity, a main risk factor in many diseases and health conditions, as hypertension, type 2 diabetes, coronary heart disease, stroke, gallbladder disease, osteoarthritis or some cancers like endometrial, breast, and colon – diseases which occupy top positions in the morbidity and mortality of the population. While it deals generally with their food habits and physical activity in order to determine which behaviours should be modified and reinforced, the survey highlights some theoretical and practical difficulties raised by such an enquiry, compared with similar ones, done in western countries.

INTRODUCTION

Using a questionnaire that would principally highlight the subjects' knowledge and practice, we initiated an enquiry concerning the nutritional habits and life-style of the Romanian adolescents at present, taking as a starting point the widely accepted fact that diet and physical activity are essential for the prevention of obesity. This idea was materialized in a range of specific items regarding the intake of the main food groups and the importance attached to them within the individual diet. What we noticed analyzing the answers was not only the subjects' poor information, but also a significant although to a certain extent predictable distance between what they know or believe that it's nutritionally healthy and putting the respective convictions into practice. At this point, there is a disparity between the number of adolescents who consider important to have breakfast and the number of those who eat nothing in the morning; of those who believe that the snacks they eat have bad effects on their health and those who buy chips or other snacks in schools; of those who do not consume milk and those convinced that milk is essential for health; not to speak about the number of those who believe that animal fat is risky for health but find themselves among those who frequently consume butter, pork and generally enjoy a meal full of fat.