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Assessment of elementary school teachers' capacity and health and nutrition training needs

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Introduction: On addressing childhood obesity, education and health promotion at school environment play a major role, particularly at elementary schools settings, where teachers act as main pivots to reach and educate children and their families. In this context an assessment of teachers' capacity and knowledge on food and nutrition and their needs of Health and Nutrition literacy and training were needed.

Methodology: Cross-sectional descriptive study using a convenience sample of 23 teachers from the Portuguese city Oeiras. Self-administrated questionnaire was developed and applied with 59 questions assessing the knowledge of the teachers in food and nutrition, their eating habits and practices of nutrition education in the classroom. Descriptive statistical methods included frequencies and valid percentages.

Results: Although 65% of the teachers have never had any training in nutrition, 91% said they include issues of food and nutrition in its elementary educational curriculum. 61% expressed the need of nutrition training. In the evaluation of knowledge related to food and nutrition, none of the teachers surveyed had 100% of correct answers, 30.4% achieved 58% of the correct answers and 26.1% answered correctly 50% of the questions. Regarding eating habits, 87% always takes breakfast; 91% eat sweet desserts more than 4 times a week; 65% refers to drink water as their drink of choice at main meals, but only 34% drinks at least 1,5L of water per day and 83% eats 4 or more meals per day.

Conclusion: These findings show that there is a substantial need for improvement in Health and Nutrition literacy of elementary schools. Moreover it would also improve their nutrition behaviour. Considering full training and nutrition capacity in elementary school, through educational programs, should be a top priority in order to counteract childhood obesity.

Biography

Emilia Alves has a Bachelor degree in Chemical Engineering-Biotechnology and has Expertise from Instituto Superior Tecnico at the University of Lisbon. She has a Bachelor degree in Nutrition Sciences from University Atlântica (Portugal). At present, she is an MSc student in Metabolic Diseases and Eating Behavior from Faculty of Medicine at the University of Lisbon and works at Research Center for Social Dynamics, Nutrition and Health (CEIDSS).

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