

Self-control feeding in children

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Introduction:

Overweight and childhood obesity are a public health problem. Therefore, it is fundamental to intervene in the factors at the behavioural level that can lead to changes.

Objectives:

To evaluate children's food self-control and to relate it to gender, the phratry, nutritional status and food preferences. To verify the influence of the nutritionist (about food literacy and the nutritional education) in the children's self-control and dietary preferences.

Methods:

The study was carried out in a sample of 66 children, aged between 4 and 6 years old, from four kindergarten in the district of Leiria. The criteria used for the analysis was: food self-control, food preferences, nutritional status, food literacy of the head of education and the effect of food education. The statistical treatment of data was performed using SPSS © version 21 software.

Results:

In the analysed sample, mainly female (53.0%), 57.6% of the children were not the first children and had normal nutritional status (77.3%); 19.7% were overweight and obese and 3.0% were thinner.

The majority of the children (54.5%) presented food self-control. The caregivers showed good knowledge in the scope of food, with an average score of 82.0%.

There was a positive significant correlation between the educator and the first choice of the children.

Regarding the children's choices secondary to the nutritionist's intervention, no significant differences were found. However, although not statistically significant it is clinically relevant, because 25 of the 66 participating children improved their choices.

Conclusions:

In the preschool stage, the nutritionist intervention can be highly beneficial. Educating for healthy habits and lifestyles, increasing awareness for food good practices and strengthening children self-control might contribute positively to the struggle against childhood obesity.