

Picky Eating Behaviour, Feeding Practices, Dietary Habits, Weight Status and Cognitive Function Among School Children in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

Introduction: Picky eating behaviour was linked to nutritional problems due to limited dietary variety. This study aimed to determine the causes and consequences associated with picky eating behaviour among school-aged children in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Methods: A total of 339 children aged seven to nine years participated in this cross-sectional study. Socio-demographic factors, eating behaviours and child/ parental feeding style were assessed through parent's questionnaires, while eating habits of children were accessed through child's questionnaire. Body height and weight were measured; body mass index (BMI) was calculated. Cognitive function level was determined using the Raven's Coloured Progressive Matrices test. Results: One third (38%) of the children were picky eaters and consumed lesser vegetables ($\chi^2 = 4.49, p = 0.034$) and fish ($\chi^2 = 5.55, p = 0.019$), but more milk and dairy products ($\chi^2 = 3.91, p = 0.048$), snacks ($\chi^2 = 6.25, p = 0.012$) and fast food ($\chi^2 = 7.35, p = 0.007$) compared to non-picky eaters. Picky eaters were more likely to have normal weight status based on weight-for-age, height-for-age and BMI-for-age compared to non-picky eaters ($p < 0.05$). Picky eaters came from a household with other picky eaters in the family and their parents tend to use an instrumental feeding style. Picky eaters had a poorer cognitive function compared to non-picky eaters ($p = 0.03$). Conclusion: We did not find significant differences in growth parameters between picky and non-picky eaters but picky eaters were more likely to have a poorer cognitive function. As parental feeding styles significantly influenced children's eating behaviour, interventions should target parents to improve their children's dietary variety.