

Short Communication

Socio-economic disparities in Australian adolescents' eating behaviours

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Submitted 8 January 2013; Final revision received 2 September 2013; Accepted 4 September 2013; First published online 23 October 2013

Abstract

Objective: To assess the association between socio-economic position (SEP) and poor eating behaviours in a large representative sample of Australian secondary-school students.

Design: Cross-sectional survey of students' vegetable, fruit, sugar-sweetened beverage and fast-food consumption assessed using validated instruments and collected via a web-based self-report format.

Setting: Secondary schools across all Australian states and territories.

Subjects: Secondary-school students (n 12 188; response rate: 54%) aged 12–17 years participating in the 2009–10 National Secondary Students' Diet and Activity (NaSSDA) survey.

Results: Overall, 25% of students reported consuming ≤ 1 serving of vegetables/d and 29% reported eating ≤ 1 serving of fruit/d. Fourteen per cent of students reported drinking at least 1–2 cups of sugar-sweetened beverages/d while 9% reported eating fast food ≥ 3 times/week. After adjusting for other demographic factors, students of lower-SEP areas were more likely to report low intake of vegetables ($F(4, 231) = 3.61, P = 0.007$) and high frequency of consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages ($F(4, 231) = 8.41, P < 0.001$) and fast food ($F(4, 231) = 4.59, P = 0.001$) compared with students of high-SEP neighbourhoods. A positive SEP association was found for fruit consumption among female students only ($F(4, 231) = 4.20, P = 0.003$). Those from lower-SEP areas were also more likely to engage in multiple poor eating behaviours ($F(4, 231) = 5.80, P < 0.001$).

Conclusions: Results suggest that socio-economic disparities in Australian adolescents' eating behaviours do exist, with students residing in lower-SEP neighbourhoods faring less well than those from high-SEP neighbourhoods. Reducing social inequalities in eating behaviours among young people should be a key consideration of future preventive strategies.

Keywords
Socio-economic position
Diet
Adolescents
Australia

Socio-economic position (SEP) is inversely associated with obesity in adolescents⁽¹⁾ and with poorer adolescent diets. International research and review articles have generally found that low SEP is associated with lower consumption of fruit and vegetables among adolescents^(2–8). However, Australian data are less definitive. A national

survey of 654 adolescents found a significant positive association between SEP and fruit consumption (both sexes) and vegetables (girls only)⁽⁹⁾, a community-based study of 2529 Victorian adolescents found a positive association between SEP and adolescent fruit consumption⁽¹⁰⁾, while a cross-sectional survey of more than 18 000 Australian secondary students found no significant association between SEP and adolescent fruit and vegetable consumption⁽¹¹⁾.

There has been considerably less research conducted assessing the association between SEP and adolescent

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