

Food and lifestyle education at primary and secondary school: an Italian project on health promotion

Marco Tarroni

D Messina¹, M Tarroni², L Catarsi², C Balestri¹, G Messina^{3,2}, N Nante^{3,2}

¹Monte dei Paschi Foundation of Siena, Siena, Italy

²Post Graduate School of Public Health, Department of Molecular and Developmental Medicine, University of Siena, Siena, Italy

³Department of Molecular and Developmental Medicine, University of Siena, Siena, Italy

Contact: marco.tarroni@student.unisi.it

Background:

Nutrition and life styles have a crucial role as health determinants. In particular, an intervention on eating habits and physical activity/inactivity does heavily influence obesity and overweight prevention, alongside associated diseases. Preteen and teenage profile is critical for developing the state of health in adulthood, and it is heavily determined by the sociocultural family background. For this reason, school could become an important actor in health promotion, in the form of coordinated and cross-disciplinary courses about food and behaviors. The aim of the study is to verify the effect of an intervention of food education in several schools.

Methods:

This cross-sectional study, originated from the “sCOOL FOOD” project of Monte dei Paschi Foundation of Siena, involves schools of southeastern Tuscany, Italy. The project currently engages various classes from primary and secondary schools in which year-round awareness campaigns are conducted. The activities consist in theory classes and workshops held by professionals or teachers of the school previously trained for the purpose. A same questionnaire was administered to families before and after each campaign, exploring eating habits, lifestyle and biometrics. The data analyzed so far

date from October 2017 to May 2018. Wilcoxon signed-rank test was performed on the distributions of children BMI classes, defined according to IOTF cutoffs, obtained exclusively from participants who submitted both questionnaires.

Results:

308 paired records of data were collected as mentioned above. We found that, after the campaign, children BMI classes distribution shift towards reduction was statistically significant ($z = -2.053$; $p < 0.05$).

Conclusions:

Since the intervention was able to influence a childhood health determinant, it could be an opportunity to compensate those family dynamics that could lead towards health disadvantages in adulthood.

Key messages:

- A coordinated and cross-disciplinary food and lifestyle year-round education campaign at school can impact on health determinants of children.
- School can correct unfavorable eating and lifestyle behaviors determined by family habits.