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Impact of nutrition policy in preschools – A Caribbean perspective

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The prevalence of childhood obesity has increased globally and this has prompted population policy approaches to tackle this problem. Since schools are an ideal background for these interventions, this study sought to evaluate the existing national school nutrition policies and make recommendations for future research. Seventeen Government / Public Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Centers were randomly selected from each of the seven educational districts in Trinidad. Each of these schools was then matched to its nearest privately-owned ECCE. Each school completed a questionnaire examining food rules, whether they received meals from the National Schools Dietary Services Limited (NSDSL), and the presence of a school garden. Type of school differences among dietary variables were assessed using the Mann Whitney U-test, while differences among continuous anthropometric variables were assessed via the independent samples t-test. All analyses were conducted using SPSS version 15 (SPSS, Inc., Chicago, IL, USA). Preschoolers attending private schools had significantly higher body fat, viewed more hours of weekend television ($p=0.048$) and drank more juice-type sugar sweetened beverages ($p=0.008$), while parents of public preschoolers were more likely to create a healthy home environment. Public schools were more likely to have school gardens, 'fruit times' and 'no soda' policies and they were also more likely to receive lunches from the NSDSL. All nutrition policies except one were 'undocumented'. Teacher comments revealed an urgent need to document nutrition policy at the preschool level, update old policy, and provide nutrition education for teachers and parents.

Biography

Anisa Ramcharitar-Bourne completed her PhD in Human Ecology (specialization Nutritional Sciences) in 2014. She is a Registered Dietitian, trained at St. Louis University, USA and has gained US certification in Childhood and Adolescent Weight Management. She is currently an Instructor at the UWI and is involved in a number of on-going research projects in the areas of picky eating, childhood obesity, mindful eating practices and sensorial analysis. She is currently a Consultant on a project entitled 'Healthy Bites' with the U.W.I. Preschool in Trinidad. She is passionate about positively influencing the health of children through education, research and policy development.

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