Factors that influence teens’ eating and physical activity behaviors:

Findings from telephone focus groups

Elissa A. Resnick, MPH
Leah Rimkus, MPH, RD
Sandy J. Slater, PhD
Dianne C. Barker, MHS
Christopher M. Quinn, BA
Frank J. Chaloupka, PhD

1. Institute for Health Research and Policy, University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, IL
2. Public Health Institute, Oakland, Calabasas, CA
Presenter Disclosures

Elissa A. Resnick, MPH

(1) The following personal financial relationships with commercial interests relevant to this presentation existed during the past 12 months:

No relationships to disclose
Learning Objectives

• Identify environmental factors that influence adolescents’ eating and activity behaviors

• Compare how these behaviors differ by urban, suburban, and rural locations

• Discuss ways to customize interventions to address barriers reported by teens
Prevalence of Obesity Among U.S. Children and Adolescents (Aged 2–19 Years)

Source: CDC.gov
Bridging the Gap is ...

• A collaborative effort to assess the impacts of policies, programs & other environmental factors on a variety of adolescent health-related behaviors

• An RWJF initiative begun in 1997 with focus on adolescent alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use and related outcomes

• More recently expanded to include youth eating practices, physical activity, and weight outcomes

• Linked to the ongoing, NIDA-funded, *Monitoring the Future* study

Focus Group Objectives

- Identify the size of the community where teens go to eat and exercise
- Understand youths’ eating and exercising behaviors and factors that influence these behaviors
  - Explore the types of foods and beverages that teens consume
  - Explore the types of activities that teens do for fun and/or for physical activity
- Understand differences in behaviors by age, gender and geography
Methods

• Computer-assisted Telephone Focus Groups
  – Kahle Research Solutions Inc.
  – Up to 90 minutes in length

• 12 focus groups with 5-10 participants each
  – Nationwide recruitment thru e-billboards, emails and purchased lists (rural)
  – Selection criteria
    • 13-18 years old
    • English-speaking
    • Attend public school
  – Stratification
    • Male/female
    • Urban/suburban/rural
    • Younger/older

• Parental consent for those younger than 18; written consent forms emailed
## Commonly Mentioned Sources of Food

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Breakfast</th>
<th>Lunch</th>
<th>Dinner</th>
<th>Snacks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Many</strong></td>
<td>• Home</td>
<td>• School</td>
<td>• Home</td>
<td>• Home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• None (skip breakfast)</td>
<td>• Home</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Movie theater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Convenience store/gas station</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Some</strong></td>
<td>• School</td>
<td>• Fast food restaurant</td>
<td>• Fast food restaurant</td>
<td>• Fast food restaurant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Fast casual restaurant</td>
<td>• Fast casual restaurant</td>
<td>• Mall food court</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• General store</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• School vending machine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Few</strong></td>
<td>• Convenience store</td>
<td>• None (skip lunch)</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Coffee shop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Fast casual restaurant</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Ice cream shop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Themes

• Rural and urban teens are more likely to get snacks at convenience stores and gas stations than suburban teens
• Urban and suburban teens are more likely to eat dinner out of the house than rural teens
• Teens with open campuses are more likely to eat lunch at fast food restaurants or coffee shops than teens with closed campuses
• Younger teens are more likely to skip breakfast than older teens
Factors Influencing Food Choices

Most Common: Time

- “I don't usually have time to eat breakfast at home in the mornings, and when my bus gets to school it’s too late, so I don't eat breakfast.”
  - Female, 13-15, urban group

- “If I’m in a rush between classes, I’ll go to a vending machine and get like a granola bar, bag of chips.”
  - Male, 16-18, urban group
Factors Influencing Food Choices

Most Common: Convenience

- “Sometimes I'll grab like a Pop Tart or a bagel or something and take it with me, or I might stop at the vending machine before I go to class.”
  – Female, 16-18, urban group

- “I eat school lunch most of the time. Sometimes we'll go over to the gas station across the street.”
  – Female, 16-18, rural group
Factors Influencing Food Choices

Somewhat Common: Money and Social

• “I don't usually eat lunch because I'm too busy hanging out with friends and things like that and plus I rarely have money to eat lunch.”
  – Male, 13-15, suburban group

• “Usually I don't really have money to buy anything, so I just kind of eat what my friends have, like if they share with me. I usually just hang out there.”
  – Female 13-15, rural group
Factors Influencing Food Choices

Least Common: Taste and Nutritional (Mis)information

- “I don't really like to eat at school. The food is just nasty. I'll usually have fries or bread.”
  - Female, 16-18, urban group

- “I guess whatever they have healthy to choose, like pizza or a hot dog.”
  - Male, 16-18, urban group
CDC and IOM Recommendations to Improve Nutrition

• Improve availability and affordability of healthier food and beverage choices in public service venues

• Restrict availability of less healthy foods in public service venues

• Incentivize food retailers to offer healthier food and beverage choices in underserved areas
# Commonly Mentioned Venues for Physical Activity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Many</th>
<th>Suburban</th>
<th>Rural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>• Park</td>
<td>• Home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>• Park</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Some</th>
<th>Suburban</th>
<th>Rural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>• School sport</td>
<td>• School sport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• School facility</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Commercial gym</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Neighborhood (walking/running/biking)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>• Commercial gym</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• School sport</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Neighborhood (walking/running/biking)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>• School sport</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Park</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Few</th>
<th>Suburban</th>
<th>Rural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>• Home</td>
<td>• School facility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>• PE class</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Themes

• Urban and suburban teens are more likely than rural teens to have access to parks
• Suburban teens are more likely than urban and rural teens to have access to school physical activity facilities regardless of participation on a team
• Rural teens are more likely than urban and suburban teens to utilize facilities that are far away
• Males are more likely than females to engage in spontaneous or unstructured physical activity (e.g. pick-up games)
Factors Influencing Physical Activity

Most Common: Convenience

- “I would love a park or some kind of field where I can play football in, instead of having to drive like two miles.”
  – Male, 16-18, urban group

- “I'm 12 miles away from my school. If I want to go to a park, I have to go between 8 to 22 miles.”
  – Male, 13-15, rural group

- Moderator: How far is close by and how far would it be when you wouldn’t go?
  Respondent: If it was a half hour or an hour away.
  – Female, 13-15, rural group.
Factors Influencing Physical Activity

Somewhat Common: Price

• “I would be on the dance team, but it’s really expensive.”
  – Female, 16-18, urban group

• “I used to [go to a health club], but then it got pretty expensive so we quit.”
  – Female, 13-15, rural group
Factors Influencing Physical Activity

Least Common: Safety

• “The closest park to my house is probably about 10 minutes away, but it’s pretty run down so I just usually don’t go to it. Then there’s this really nice park about 15 minutes away that I go to with some of my friends sometimes...It’s pretty new, so there’s not a lot of vandalism there. The other one, the closer one just isn’t taken care of at all and the other one is.”
  – Female, 13-15, rural group
From the mouths of babes...

- “The more I think about it, the more I think about the days where I've said, you know, let's get a bunch of guys together and go play basketball, and then I've realized I can't just walk outside my door and find a hoop. So I really do think that [environment] has some impact.”
  
  – Male, 16-18, rural group
CDC and IOM Recommendations to Increase Physical Activity

• Require physical education in schools and increase the amount of physical activity in PE programs in schools (CDC)
• Increase opportunities for extra curricular physical activity
• Improve access to outdoor recreational facilities
For more information:

www.impacteen.org

www.yesresearch.org

www.bridgingthegapresearch.org