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Evaluation of a nutrition education program at the Dutch out-of-school care during summer holidays

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Background:

School-based nutrition education has increasingly been used to teach children about nutrition. With over half a million children attending out-of-school care in the Netherlands, this might be a suitable setting for nutrition education as well. The aim of this study was to evaluate the implementation of the program 'Spoony's Gezonde Smikkelweken' for out-of-school care among staff and parents.

Methods:

The program consists of 4 cooking, play and eating activities, a home-workbook and an online platform to promote vegetable consumption during the holidays. In July 2022, 585 out-of-school care locations for 4-12 year-olds across the Netherlands implemented the program. All locations received digital questionnaires to be distributed among the staff and parents on appropriateness, implementation, appreciation and perceived effects. Also semi-structured interviews were conducted with 11 employees for more detailed feedback.

Results:

The questionnaire was filled out by 410 employees before the program and by 327 employees and 79 parents after the program. The 4 activities were implemented by 77%-96% of the locations. The staff was generally positive about the program; easy to fit into their daily routine (90%), suitable for the children (82%), well-organised (92%) and willing to implement it again (99%). Besides, they reported a higher number of children willing to taste vegetables after the program than before (57% vs. 37%) and vegetables eaten more often as a snack and at lunch (+17%). A majority of the children took the workbook home (82%) and did one or more activities from it (84%). Parents were generally positive about the program (4.6±0.8) and the attention to healthy eating at this setting (99%).

Conclusions:

This program has been successfully received by staff and parents as a suitable form of nutrition education at out-of-school care. Despite a low response rate among parents, it appeared promising to also reach children's home situation.

Key messages:

- Nutrition education provided by out-of-school care seems suitable, similar as provided at schools.
- Spoony's 'Gezonde Smikkelweken' appeared a suitable program for Dutch out-of-school care.