ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS THAT IMPACT THE EATING BEHAVIORS OF LOW-INCOME AFRICAN AMERICAN ADOLESCENTS IN BALTIMORE CITY

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RESEARCH QUESTIONS

• How do different environmental contexts influence the food-related habits of low-income adolescents in Baltimore?

• How do adolescents perceive and understand their food environments?
BACKGROUND

• Obesity rate among young people ages 12 to 19 tripled between 1980 and 2008 (5% to 18%) [1]

• Rates of obesity higher among children of color:
  • 21% among non-Hispanic Black adolescents
  • 16% among Hispanic adolescents
  • 12% among non-Hispanic White adolescents [1]

• Predominantly Black urban neighborhoods shown to have higher fast food density, fewer chain grocery stores, and poorer quality food within existing stores [2-3].
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

• Ecological Systems Theory – identify the environmental contexts in which people are embedded to help explain their development and behaviors. A nested model. [4-5]

• Broader perspective on levels of influence – societal, political, policy.

• Limitations of linear, sequential view of causality. [6]
METHODS

Methodology

• Qualitative Approach
• Methods – in-depth interviews (IDIs), focus groups (FGs) and observation.

Sample

• African American adolescents attending Baltimore City public recreation centers in low-income neighborhoods.
• n=20; 15 girls and 5 boys aged 10 to 16.
In-depth Interview Questions and Probes
1. Tell me about what you usually do after you leave school. What is a normal day like? Where do you go?
2. What do you consider to be a snack? Are there any foods you usually like to snack on? Tell me about them. What do you like about them?
3. Can you tell me a little more about what the word “healthy” means to you? What makes a food healthy? Where would you get these foods?
4. What about if I were a new kid at your school? What kind of food would I be able to find there? What do you think about the food at school? Can you tell me about what you normally eat during the school day?

Focus Group Sample Questions and Probes
1. Imagine we are walking around the neighborhood you live in. What is it like?
2. Can you tell us about the places you can go to get food in your neighborhood? What are they like? Where do you like to go?
3. How about the food at school? Can you tell us what you think about that?
4. Can you tell us what you think “healthy” means? What makes something healthy?
5. How about what “unhealthy” means? What makes something unhealthy?
ANALYSIS & RESULTS

Figure 1. Environmental contexts and thematic categories that emerged from qualitative data analysis.
NEIGHBORHOOD CONTEXT

• [1] Accessibility of Food

  “Yeah, if you're really hungry, like, instead of cooking something, you'll just walk to the store and get some candy and stuff” (10 year old girl, FG)

• [2] Neighborhood Safety

  “They don't do refunds, so you get a banana and you see the other side of it and it's probably, like, real soft or something, they won't give you your money back” (16 year old girl, FG)
SCHOOL CONTEXT

• “We have strict practices. We can't talk or we have pushups or we have to run. They let us have breaks, and we can only drink water and we can't have any sweets before practice and we can't bring food into the gym” (10 year old girl, IDI)

• “They [the school] serve food but I don't like it. Nasty. They serve, like, hamburgers. And they serve, supposed to be lasagna but doesn't look like lasagna. And they serve, like, hotdogs, I don't eat hotdogs, and they serve, like, corn and broccoli, pizza. Pizza is kind of burned. Burned pizza. Stuff like that. I don't like school lunch” (16 year old girl, IDI)
FAMILY CONTEXT

• [1] Role Modeling and Monitoring
  • “Whatever is in there” (15 year old boy, IDI)

• [2] Family Health History
  • “I know I need to eat better, so I won't get diabetes like in my family” (16 year old girl, IDI)
PEER CONTEXT

• “All my friends like the same things I eat” (10 year old girl, IDI)

• “From here it's, like, 2 stores down there and people, like, they conversate and they buy food, they buy goodies. Just have fun.” (16 year old girl, FG)
DISCUSSION

• Peers
  • Less reflective on peer influences.

• Family and the home environment.
  • Does age matter?

• Schools
  • Learning about nutrition and health.
  • “Nasty” food, going home hungry.

• Neighborhood
  • What is there? What is realistic?
LIMITATIONS

• Is it biased? Generalizable?
  • Transferability?

• How to increase trustworthiness?
  • Methodological triangulation
  • Researcher triangulation
WHY QUALITATIVE?

• Appropriate to answer different questions:

• Explores process and meaning

• How are qual and quant research related?
WORD TO STUDENTS

If you want to publish, my advice:

• Find a mentor.

• Start a writing group.

• Don’t give up!
QUESTIONS?

Thank you!
REFERENCES


