Project “INFORMA A SCUOLA”: Healthy lifestyles promotion to prevent overweight among children in primary school

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PROJECT “INFORMA A SCUOLA”: HEALTHY LIFESTYLES PROMOTION TO PREVENT OVERWEIGHT AMONG CHILDREN IN PRIMARY SCHOOL

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BACKGROUND

The Municipality of Modena, Northern Italy, in collaboration with the Local Health Authority, has been organizing numerous health education interventions in the primary schools to prevent childhood obesity, as part of the project “INforma a Scuola”.

The project focuses on healthy dietary habits and physical activities in the context of the WHO European program “Healthy Cities”, of which Modena is the Italian coordinator.

In 2018, in collaboration with the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, a survey has been designed to evaluate diet and physical activity of children, and parental misperception of childhood overweight.
STUDY DESIGN

A cross-sectorial study was conducted in February 2018 involving on a voluntary basis children, and their families, attending the first class (aged 5-6 years) of 29 public primary schools in Modena. Fifteen schools (38 classes), agreed to participate for a total of 890 children without any exclusion criteria.

A self-administered anonymous questionnaire was proposed to the parents, with an introductory letter, after obtaining a written consent.

The questionnaire included information on socio-demographic characteristics of children and parents.
DATA COLLECTION (2)

**Children data**

**Anthropometric measures** (weight and height) used to calculate the Body Mass Index for classification of children in categories, following the USA Center of Disease Control suggestions (7):
- underweight (<5th percentile)
- healthy weight (5th to <85th percentile)
- overweight (85th to <95th percentile)
- obese (≥95th percentile)

**Physical activities**: information on hours watching TV daily, days for sport activities and mode of transportation to go to school

**Dietary behaviors**: daily consumption of fruits, vegetables, sugary or carbonated beverages and the habit to have breakfast and mid-morning snack

DATA COLLECTION (3)

Parents data

Parental perceptions

• on their child’s weight category:
  “Do you think your child is underweight, normal weight, slightly overweight, very overweight?”

• on usefulness of healthy dietary education and physical activities at school: 
  *five-point Likert-scale, from 1=’not useful’ to 5=’very useful’.*
RESULTS (1)

Participants: 661 questionnaires, 74.9% of the total children population

Children overweight/obesity: 25.3%

Fruit/vegetables consumption: 60.8% less than 3 portions/day

Skipping breakfast: 11.5% and skipping mid-morning snack (7.5%) are significantly associated with parents’ low education and, also, with foreign nationality.

Physical activity: 58.6% make less than <5 days/week, in particular among immigrants
41.6% use car/bus to reach school in particular among Italian families.

Habits significantly affecting children’s overweight are skipping breakfast and mid-morning snack
RESULTS (2)

Parental perception:

16% of parents did not consider healthy dietary education activities at school as useful. This lack of interest is connected to mothers’ low level of education and to mothers’ foreign origins.

25% of parents were not interested in physical activities at school during non-school hours.

Among families of overweight or obese children, 60% of parents incorrectly perceived their child's weight status.
At the end of the school year, a satisfaction questionnaire for parents has been proposed to all the 38 first classes involved in the baseline survey, with a response rate of 59% (521 questionnaires). We are analyzing the collected data.

These results will be used to analyze the impact of our educational interventions on behaviors associated with childhood overweight.

Anyway, data of our survey “Okkio alla Salute”, show that during the 10 years of our project the trends of childhood overweight and obesity, at the age of primary school children, are not increasing in Modena.