

A qualitative study exploring healthy eating among adolescents in Bangladesh

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Rationale and objectives



Inadequate fruits and vegetable intake (1)

94% adolescent girls (1)



91% adolescent boys (1)



- aged between 10 and 19 years
- one-fifth of the total population



Overweight and obesity range from 2% to 26% (2)

- To explore the perceptions and practices of healthy eating and unhealthy eating from the perspectives of adolescents, parents and teachers;
- To identify the drivers of unhealthy eating among adolescents from different stakeholders' perspectives

1. Urmy et. al., Osong 2020
2. Khan et. Al., Health Policy Tech. 2019

Methodology

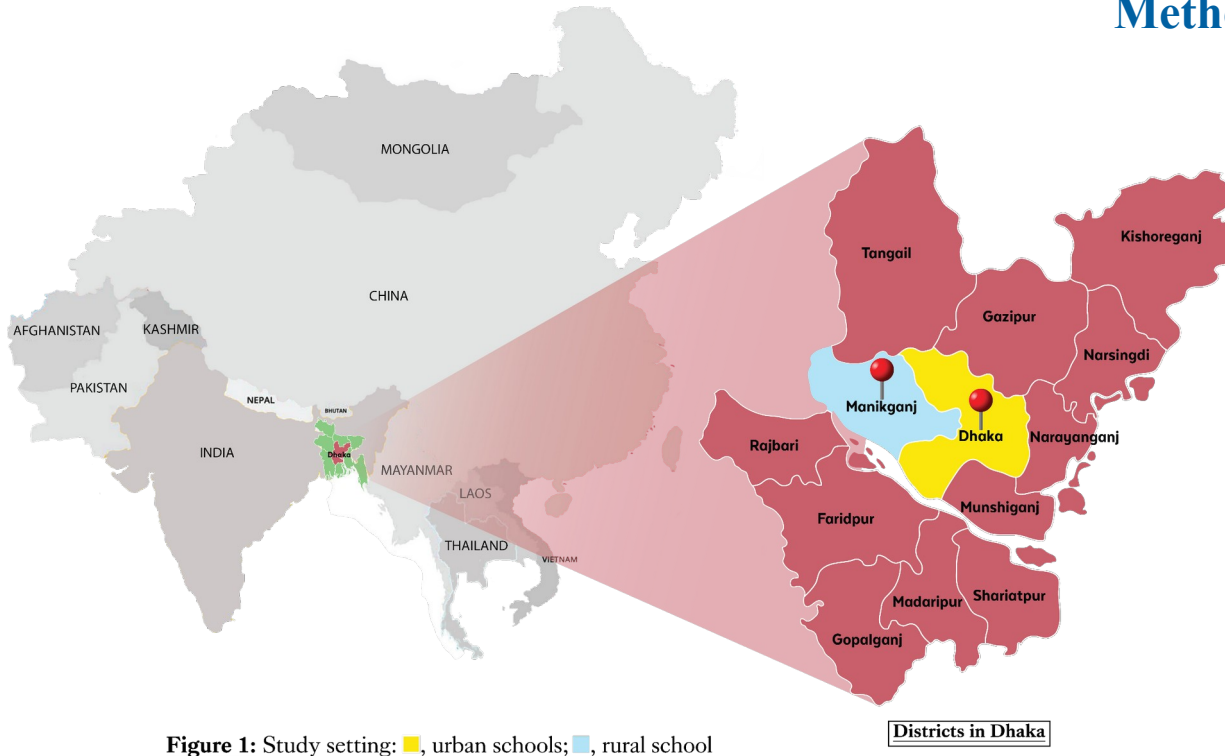


Figure 1: Study setting: ■, urban schools; ■, rural school

■ 2 Urban secondary schools- 1 private and 1 public

■ 1 rural secondary public school

12 focus group discussions (FGDs) with 72 participants

- 3 FGDs with adolescents girls (n=19, age: 11-14 years)
- 3 FGDs with adolescent boys (n=19, age: 11-14 years)
- 3 FGDs with parents (n=19)
- 3 FGDs with Teachers (n=15)

❖ *Researcher-generated photo elicitation approach*

❖ *Field notes during tiffin time and after school*

12 key informant interviews

- Government: Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Palli Karma Sahayak Foundation
- Non-government organisations and International non-governmental organisations: BRAC, Nutrition International, UNICEF Bangladesh, practising dietician
- School management: Head teachers

Data analysis: Thematic analysis using inductive coding in NVivo

Data validation: Investigator triangulation

Reporting: COREQ (COnsolidated criteria for REporting Qualitative research) checklist

Theme 1: Mismatch between knowledge and eating behaviour

1.1 Social positioning and food culture versus knowledge

"All my friends either buy snacks from the canteen or bring burgers, pizza. I know my friends will tease me for bringing bread and banana."
-Girl, FGD, urban private school



1.2 Convenience versus knowledge

"We working people cannot make tiffin for our children, so we order fast foods online."
-Mother, FGD, urban private school



1.3. Body image concern versus knowledge

"a six-pack is a new craze- they learn from entertainment media and their peers. Ask them about healthy eating- they will answer well- but are they getting all nutrients properly?- Father, FGD, rural public school



1.4 Preferences and taste versus knowledge

"We are taught in school that fast foods harm health, but they are very tasty."
-Boy, FGD, urban public school

Results

Theme 2: Exposure to food marketing

2.1 Accessibility to tempting unhealthy foods in the community

"I wish there were so many restaurants and online food delivery like Dhaka in our village."
-Girl, FGD, rural public school



2.3 Perception of trustworthiness in the food market

"Eating at a fast food restaurant might be better than purchasing adulterated foods in markets."
-Father, FGD, urban govt. school



2.2 Digital food marketing

"There are frequent advertisements on Ytube about Food Panda, Pathao Food and even discount offers, like BOGO (buy one get one) at different restaurants."
-Boy, FGD, urban private school



Theme 3: Prioritisation of healthy eating in schools

3.1 The impact of study schedule

"We have private tutoring after school, so sometimes the lunch is always skipped."
 - Girl, FGD, urban public school



3.2 Healthy eating in the curriculum

"They only have MCQs on healthy eating in the final exam, so they usually skip the chapters."
 -Teacher, FGD, urban private school

3.3 School food environment



Urban school



Rural school

Results

Theme 4: Healthy eating policies

4.1 Adolescent voice is missing

"It is a significant drawback that we develop policies and design interventions without hearing out the adolescents' needs and ideas."
- KII-2, BRAC

4.2 Geographical priorities



4.3 Resource

"Unfortunately, we do not have a solid manpower and sufficient funds."
-KII, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare

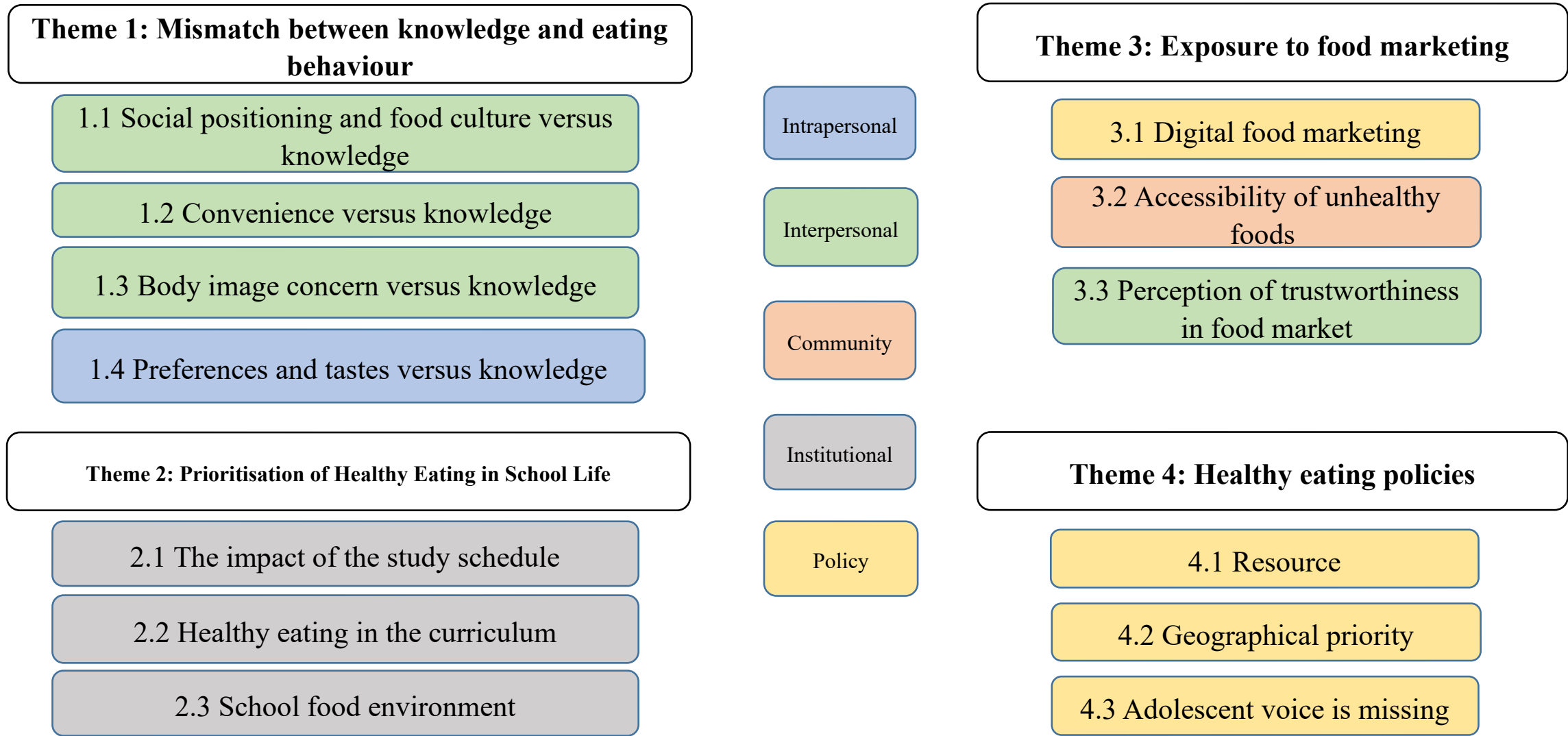


Figure 2: Drivers of unhealthy eating among Bangladeshi adolescents within the socio-ecological framework (3)

Implications

- Unhealthy eating goes beyond knowledge
- Food environment influences eating behaviour
- Healthy food is not always prioritised in school
- Drivers of unhealthy eating operate at different levels – individual, schools to societies and government.
- Adolescents' voices are missing in policy design and implementation
- Policy prioritisation and limited resources impact consistent implementation of programmes

