



NUI Galway
OÉ Gaillimh

Adolescent perceptions of local food environments: “it would take a lot of effort to eat healthy”

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Background



- Eating out-of-home has become habitual and is associated with fat intake and body fatness ¹
- Adolescents can consume up to $1/3$ energy outside of home ²
- Within 1 km of schools in Ireland – average of seven ‘local shops’ and four fast food outlets ³
- Majority of work has used objective measures of food environments
 - density and distance to food outlets and associations with diet or body weight
- Less work on subjective measures of food environment – views of adolescents and how they navigate their local food environments

Aims and Methods

- To explore young people's perception of the food environment close to their school
- Qualitative design using multi-methods
 - Mapping exercises
 - Photographs
 - Group discussions with topic guide
- Schools purposively sampled (n= 96 students, aged 12-18 years)
- Ethics granted by NUI Galway Research Ethics Committee



Workshop exercises

- In groups – pinned local sites and buildings on a large map
- Individually – locate and name the food outlets close to their school
 - Highlight those they use
 - Draw a boundary around their food environment
- Topic guide – access, types of food, reasons, barriers, facilitators, quality, change
- Data managed in NVivo and analysed thematically



Results – Food Outlets (AVAILABILITY)



Spar/Londis/
Centra/Costcut
ter

Lidl/ Aldi/
Dunnes

Topaz

Subway

Apache/
Papa Johns/
Dominos

Local
supermarkets

Supermacs/
Mc Donalds/
BK

Local fast
food
places

Supervalu



Sweet shops

Local
Cafes

Local pubs

Easons

Local
health
food shop

Local
restaurants

Local hotels

Results – FOODS PURCHASED

Health bars

Sesame sticks

Energy drinks –
Edge, Lucozade
sport

Coffee

7up/Coke/Mi
wadi

Pot
Noodles

Milk,
water

Biscuits,
buns

Croissant

Nuts,
popcorn

Yoghurt



Burgers,
pizza

Salads, fruit
salads

Chocolate,
donuts

Chicken curry,
lasagne

Wedges

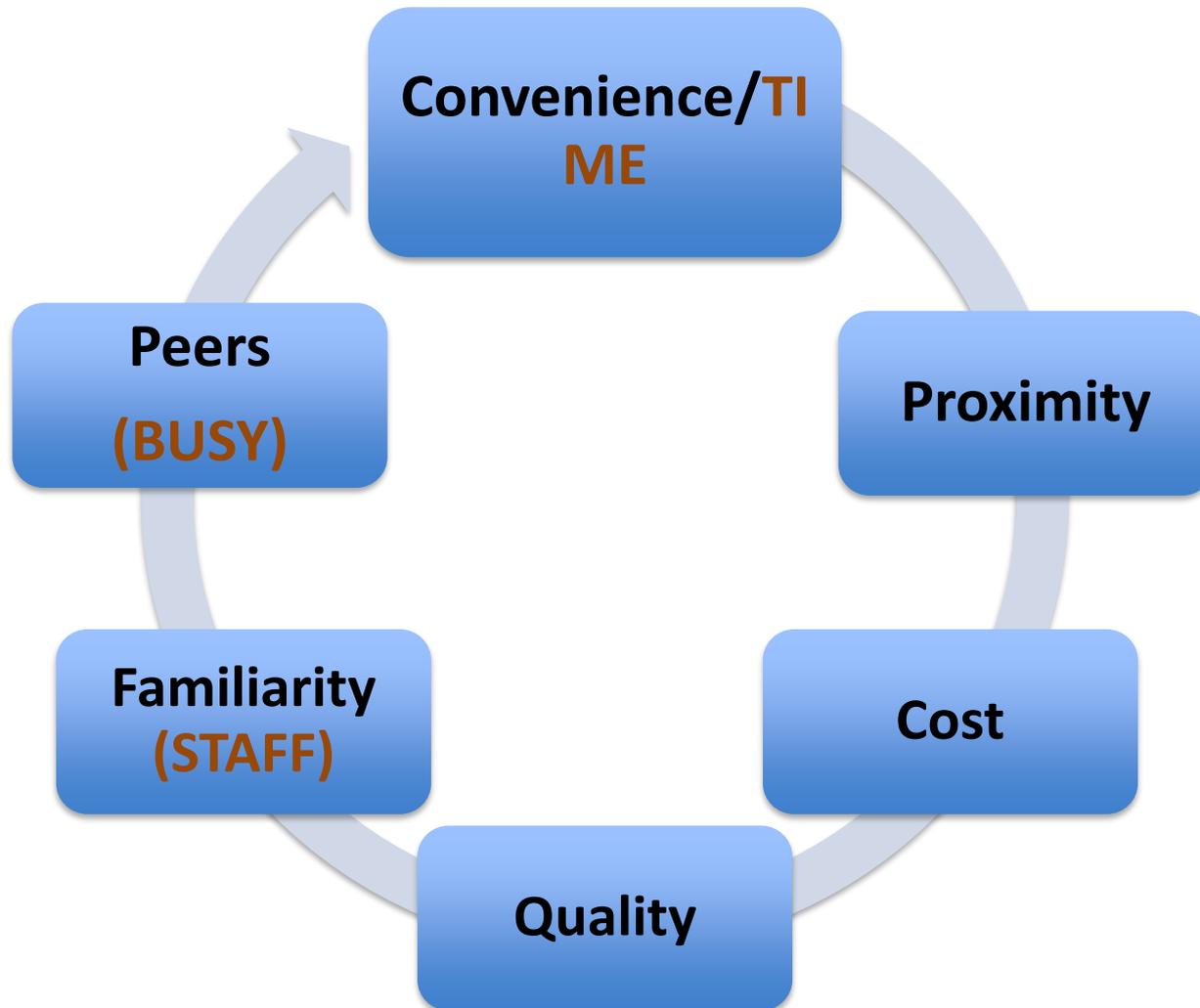
Sweets

Wraps, paninis,
soup

Sausage (rolls)
and chips

Hot chicken
fillet rolls

Drivers: food outlets and food choice



- **CONVENIENCE** – “They’re just quick” **“You don’t have time to be like trying new places”**
- **PROXIMITY** - “It’s across the road”
- **COST** - *“because they’re cheap and like you get enough bon bons that would last the day.”* **“they’re too dear”**
- **QUALITY** - “It’s way fresher” **“they’re out of date”..**
- **FAMILIARITY** - “You know the place well enough” **“They’re mean”**
- **PEERS** - “A lot of people just stand outside Centra rather than go in and buy something” **“they’re too busy”**

Choosing 'healthy' food

- *“Its kind of hard to make good choices and it costs more”*
- “You’re not going to get an apple and a banana if there’s sausage rolls and like curly fries ”
- “Yeah it would take a lot of effort (to eat healthy) because like ...you’d have to buy the wraps and then you’d have to go ...buy the say lettuce and ham separately. Two really big packets ”
- “Like for a bag of chips it’s like €2.30 and then to go and get, like something else, like a fruit salad is, like €4.80”

Conclusion

- Young people are not loyal to particular food stores or brands
- Value for money, location and time are key factors influencing choice of outlet and foods at school times
- The healthy choice is not the easy choice
- This study provides insight into how the local food environment may be altered to enable healthy choices



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