

The Balanced Nutrition Education Programme in Schools in Turkey

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Background

The nutritional status of the Turkish population mirrors that in other European countries and around the world. Turkey currently ranks second in Europe in terms of the number of overweight people. However, this overweight population is increasing more rapidly than elsewhere. Almost a quarter of 7 and 8 year old children in urban environments are now obese whilst in rural areas the figure is less at about 13-15%. The attendant risks of obesity including cardiovascular disease, Type 2 diabetes, certain types of cancer and reduced quality of life and life-expectancy are well documented and are manifest at high levels in Turkey. In addition to the more obvious problems associated with

obesity, several other nutrition related issues prevail in Turkey. These include, stunting of children due to malnourishment, which predominates in rural communities, running at about 5-6%, iodine deficiency which was recorded at 27.8% of the population in 2009 and high salt intake which, at 14.8 grams per day, is almost 3 times the recommended level.

Story of Balanced Nutrition Project

Turkey has a relatively young population in comparison with other European countries, providing an excellent opportunity to make a positive difference. Against this background the Sabri Ülker Food Research Foundation was established in 2009 with a view to

improving public health in Turkey and beyond. A particular focus of the Foundation has been food, nutrition and physical activity education in schools.

The Balanced Nutrition Education Programme was established in 2011 in collaboration with the British Nutrition Foundation (BNF). BNF education materials were adapted for local use by colleagues at the Faculty of Health Sciences, Hacettepe University in Ankara. The initial target was 2nd to 4th Grade students but, spurred on by the success of the programme, students from preschool up to 8th Grade are now included. Some 6 million students, their teachers and families have now been reached by the programme. Research has been undertaken to evaluate the impact of the programme

and positive results have been achieved with respect to energy intake (reduced), weight management (improved) and physical activity (increased). In 2017 the Balanced Nutrition Education Project won the "Most Successful Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR Project)" award, organized by Türkiye Sağlık Gönülleri Vakfı, The Health Volunteers Foundation of Turkey. Details of the programme and the results obtained will be provided.

References

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