

ABSTRACT

Nutrition standards and nature of foods sold at the university of Ghana canteens

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Background: Substantial evidence have shown that food environment contributes to the increasing obesity and other nutrition-related non-communicable diseases (NCDs) among children and adults. The increasing obesity prevalence and nutrition-related NCDs suggest there is a need for a more comprehensive and robust approach including regulating environmental food exposures. In certain jurisdictions, nutrition standards can regulate the nature and quality of foods sold in schools contributing to a healthy food environment.

Objective: The study aimed to determine the availability of nutrition standards and to assess the nature of foods sold in canteens at the University of Ghana.

Methods: A cross sectional study design using both qualitative and quantitative methods was used. In-depth interviews were conducted with stakeholders who have core mandate in regulation of food service businesses in the University of Ghana. A Questionnaire was used to determine nature of food and food hygiene practices of canteens at the University of Ghana. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize data from the different food categories sold at the canteens and presented in the form of means, percentages, graphs, tables and charts. Proportions were calculated for categorical variables. Associations were determined between food categories and some selected food outlets characteristics using the Pearson chi square. A p-value less than 0.05 was regarded as significant.

Results: There was sale of energy-dense foods in canteens of the University of Ghana. Majority of the eateries sold sugar sweetened beverages (84.7%), refined carbohydrates (80.6%), and fried foods (93.9 %). The sale of fruits or vegetables and whole grains were 40.8% and 38.8% respectively. There was a significant association between the sale of sugar sweetened beverages and years of operation of food outlets.

The study identified two nutrition standards that regulate food service business at the University of Ghana. These were food hygiene and safety standards (with University-wide application) and food-based standards (pertaining to the only female-residence of the University).

The food hygiene and safety practices of the food outlets determined from several food hygiene and safety factors was fair.

Conclusion: The University of Ghana canteens sell energy dense meals substantial consumption of which increases one's risk to NCDs.