

More, more, more: food, fat and African refugee and migrant children

AMN Renzaho and C Burns

School of Health Sciences, Deakin University, Melbourne 3125

Background: In Australia, there is a scarcity of data related to the nutrient intakes and health of migrant children from developing countries.

Objective: To determine food, energy and nutrient intakes of 3-to-12-year-old children from various sub-Saharan African (SSA) sub-populations living in Melbourne.

Design: Subjects were recruited, using a snowball sampling technique. Data were collected by questionnaire-assisted interview with a parent using bi-lingual interviewers. Dietary data was collected using a previously validated “photo-assisted food frequency questionnaire” methodology. Each child was weighted and measured. Energy and nutrient intakes were determined using Food Works ®

Results: Data was obtained on 337 children who migrated to Australia either as refugees or migrants. These 3-to-12-year-old SSA children exhibited post-migration dietary intakes that were higher than data for Australian children in the same age bracket (NNS95). The daily food intake averaged 3184g (95%CI: 3058-3311g). The energy, total fat and saturated fat intakes averaged respectively 13.7MJ (95%CI: 13.2-14.3MJ), 128g (95%CI: 122-134g) and 51g (95%CI: 49.4-54.4g). The proportion of energy derived from fats averaged 34.6% (95%CI: 34.1-35.2%) for total fat and 14% (95%CI: 13.8-14.3%) for saturated fat. 27% percent of the children were obese or overweight.

Conclusion: The evaluation of the post-migration diet of SSA refugee and migrant children may indicate high energy and fat intakes . This would be consistent with high level of obesity in this sample. It is also possible that this population may over-report intake. More research is required into weight gain in this population.