

Family Meals and Wellbeing among NZ young people

Lead Author(s)

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Data of submission to AHRG

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*This DAP is submitted to fulfil the requirements of a Families Commission research project. Investigators of the original grant application were myself, Simon, Elizabeth, Terry, Shanthi and Sue Grant.

Research questions to be addressed or study objectives

1. To describe the prevalence of young people who ate meals with their family in the previous week.
2. To describe the demographic characteristics (age, sex, ethnicity, nzdep) and household characteristics (who young people live with, family size, number of homes, parental figures) of young people who share meals with their families.
3. To describe the relationship between family meals and *family connection* and *parental monitoring*.
4. To describe the relationship between family meals and *dietary indicators*, *health and wellbeing indicators*, and *risk taking behaviours* among young people, and to determine if these associations are significant while controlling for demographics and family connection/ monitoring variables.

<i>Family connection (scale)</i>	Fun with family (home11) Get along (home12) Relationship with family (home13) Relationships with mum and dad (home14 and 16)
<i>Parental monitoring (scale)</i>	Family wants to know where you are (home19) Parents knowledge of student (home18) Friends come to students house (home23)
<i>Dietary indicators</i>	Fast food consumption (food5) Food availability at home (food9) Fruit and vegetable consumption (food10) Parental support for healthy eating (food13,15)
<i>Health and wellbeing indicators</i>	Overweight/ obesity Unhealthy weight loss behaviours (food26, 29) WHO wellbeing index Depression (RADS)
<i>Risk-taking behaviours</i>	Current cigarette use Binge drinking Current marijuana use Inconsistent contraception use Suicidal thoughts

Background

Family meals provide a forum for all family members to regularly spend time together, discuss family issues, and role modelling and monitoring of family member behaviours. Furthermore, family meals also provide a forum for the provision and sharing of healthy

foods. A growing body of international research suggests that the health and social outcomes for children and young people are better among those who regularly eat meals with their families. Yet, data from Youth'07 suggests that fewer than 60% of young people in New Zealand eat a meal with their family most nights of the week.

A growing body of research is emerging to suggest that regular family meals provide an important, protective benefit for children and young people with regard to a number of health and social outcomes. Reports of studies conducted in the US have documented that adolescents who eat meals with their families are less likely to use alcohol, tobacco or marijuana, less likely to be depressed or experience problems at school, less likely to adopt unhealthy weight control behaviours, and more likely to have better nutrition and eating patterns. A Japanese study has found that sharing family meals was associated with lower rates of obesity and adequate sleep for children and adolescents. Furthermore, many of these studies have been longitudinal studies which have demonstrated some of these benefits over a five year period.

The overall aim of the proposed study is to determine how participation in family meals is associated with a range of important health and social benefits for children and young people.

Proposed co-authors

Simon, Elizabeth, Shanthi, Terry and Sue Grant were all co-investigators on the Families Commission grant application. Others interested?

Proposed analyst(s)

Jennifer Utter, in consultation with Elizabeth

Type of publication

Full publication(s) in peer-reviewed journal(s)
Report for Families Commission

Proposed outlet

Journal of Adolescent Health
Public Health Nutrition

Proposed timeline

July – initial analyses
August/ September – prepare manuscript revisions and feedback on manuscript
October – submission of article for peer-review
November/ December – preparation and submission of final report to FC

Variables to be used in paper

Family meals (food8)

As noted above:

Demographics
Household characteristics
Family connection
Parental monitoring
Dietary indicators
Health and wellbeing indicators
Risk taking behaviours

Analytic methods proposed

The prevalence of young people who share meals with their families will be presented as weighted frequencies with 95% confidence intervals. Chi-square tests will be used to determine statistically significant differences ($p < 0.05$) between demographic and household characteristics and frequency of family meals. The independent association between family meals and family connection/ monitoring will be estimated while adjusting for age, sex, and ethnicity of the students. Multiple regression models will be used to determine the associations between family meals and student dietary indicators, health and wellbeing indicators, and risk-taking behaviours while controlling for age, sex, NZDep, ethnicity, and parental connectedness/ monitoring.

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