

Analysis of Two School Feeding Programs in Alto das Pombas, Brazil

For many families, school feeding programs are an essential part of life, as they often serve as a primary source of nutrition for children. The food one consumes in the early stages of life is critical for proper physical and mental development, and lays down a foundation for eating habits later in life. Because one's diet is closely linked to the acquisition, or absence, of many diseases and illnesses, it is critical that one receives the education and ability to follow a healthy lifestyle with healthy eating habits. Over the past few decades, Brazil has been undergoing a nutritional transition, with a diet becoming more concentrated in industrialized and processed foods. Uncoincidentally, food related chronic diseases, such as diabetes and hypertension, have recently become top killers for the Brazilian population (Cesar G Victora, 2011). Because children spend such a large portion of their childhood at school, it is necessary that schools are providing students with nutritious food that will promote a healthy lifestyle and proper development throughout the stages of their life. This study is focused on understanding the main factors that go into the decisions regarding what types of food are served to children attending public schools in Salvador, Brazil. My main focus was on the factors of politics and culture, and the role they play in the resulting nutritious quality of the food being served to the students.

This project was conducted in the neighborhood of Alto das Pombas, located in the Northeast region of Brazil. Over the course of four weeks I spent time at two local public schools, one elementary school with a government-run school feeding program, and one pre school, with a school feeding program run by a private company. Through a series of formal and informal interviews, participation, and personal observations, I analyzed the systematic differences between the feeding programs of these two schools, and how it dictated the food provided to the students. The food served in the elementary school had a stronger cultural influence, typically serving meals native to the region, such as moqueca, and other combinations of rice and meat. The cultural influence was also observed in how the food was prepared, using a larger quantity of sugar and butter. The school staff and community members unanimously agreed that the food provided by the private company in the pre-school was of better quality, serving a wider variety of foods that were of greater nutritional value. One main objective of the company is to have "the meals planned by nutritionists who accompany the whole process of preparation of food, from the selection of ingredients to the final delivery of the meal to the student" (Nutriplus Alimentação, 2018), a service the government-run elementary school did not have. These meals usually contained fresh fruits and vegetables, however these vegetables were typically served raw which is unusual in Salvador, and often ended up being thrown away rather than consumed. These observations and assessments will serve to inform future dietary planning and nutritional programming at each school to compose a menu that balances both food that is of high nutritional value, as well as culturally considerate and appealing to children.

Key words: school, nutrition, politics, culture, children

References

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