

Using GUS for academic research

Experiences and challenges in using nutritional data



Valeria Skafida

University of Edinburgh,

Social Policy Department

Centre for Research on Families and Relationships

Email: valeria.skafida@ed.ac.uk



centre for research on
families and relationships

The research question



Context

- the process of eating can influence the food eaten
- meal habits which bring the family together favour healthier eating habits in children.
- social quality of meal times related to food eaten by children.

Question

Do shared family eating opportunities help mothers teach their children to adopt healthier eating habits?

Cause and Outcome

- Dependent: what children eat
- Independent: How, when, why, where children eat

Challenges with the dependent

Measuring 'diets'

- GUS is not exclusively about nutrition
- Guidelines for children aged 5+ based on *quantities* (e.g. 5-a-day).
- Children under 5 - Food Standards Agency used *frequency* and *variety* of foods eaten, rather than *quantity*.
- GUS focuses on *how often* and *how many different* foods children consume,

Vegetable Consumption

- Vegetables - more likely eaten at meal-times?
- Require more parental persuasion?

Unhealthy Snacking

- Three survey questions were combined to capture which children typically ate unhealthy snacks between meals (if children typically snacked on *at least one* of the following between meals: “cakes or biscuits”, “sweets or chocolate”)



ORIGINAL VARIABLE	Derived	NEW VARIABLE
On a typical day, how many different fresh/frozen/tinned fruit does child eat? (0/1/2-3/4-5/5+)	→ ✓	Poor dietary category [Based on transformation of categorical responses into numerical scale, see text derivation details]
On a typical day, how many different fresh/frozen/tinned veg does child eat? (0/1/2-3/4-5/5+)	↗	
How often does the child eat: Sweets or chocolate (times per day/per week/per month)	↗	
How often does the child eat: Crisps or other savoury snacks (nuts, crackers, cheese) (times per day/per week/per month)	↗	
How often does the child eat: Drinks soft drinks (excluding lowcal/diet drinks) (times per day/per week/per month)	↗	
On a typical day, how many different fresh/frozen/tinned veg does child eat? (0/1/2-3/4-5/5+)	→ ✓	If child consumes 0 or 1 types of vegetables on a typical day
If the child is hungry between meals what does it usually eat?	→ ✓	If child usually eats unhealthy snacks between meals [Bases on child eating at least one of following: Crisps/Cakes, biscuits/Sweets or chocolate]
Crisps	↗	
Cakes, biscuits	↗	
Sweets or chocolate	↗	
Breakfast cereal		
Bread, toast or similar (e.g. crumpets or muffins)		
Does the child eat a variety of foods? [Eats most things/ eats reasonable variety of things/child is a fussy eater]	→ ✓	Child does not eat a variety of things [Based on children reported as being “fussy eaters”]

Challenges with the independents

Indicators of Family Meal Rituals

- Rather than what children eat, eating patterns refer to the how, when, where, why, and with whom children eat.

Indicators not collected in GUS

- Parent's diets?
- Ideally, the analysis would control for maternal dietary habits, and while this is not currently possible with existing GUS data, it could be captured in future data collection sweeps.
- Theory-informed assumption: mothers who are more 'hands on' in children's diets are more likely to be from more advantaged backgrounds, and more likely to therefore be eating healthier diets themselves.

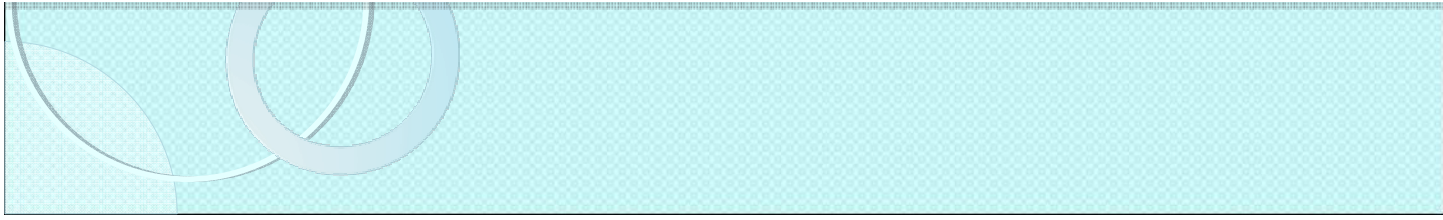
Reversing the research question?

- How does the food children eat or refuse to eat affect meal habits and social quality of mealtimes?
- Cyclical causality?
- Meal habits and dietary quality data from the same sweep - although this task may prove difficult even when using longitudinal data.

RECODED VARIABLE
How often child eats with parent & family (SW1-34months) Every day/ most days Twice a week/less often/never
How often child eats with parent & family (SW3-58months) Every day/ most days Twice a week/less often/never
How often child has meals at regular times Always Usually/sometimes/never
How often child eats same food as parent for main meal Always/almost always Sometimes Never, almost never
Where child usually eats main meal Kitchen, dining room, living room-dining room Other room

Days last week that child ate take-away meal (e.g. fish & chips) Once or less Twice or more
Days last week child ate main meal made with fresh ingredients 4 times or less 5-7 times
“Meal-times are a rush” Quite often/mostly Never/Occasionally
“Meal-times give us time to talk to each other” Quite often/mostly Never/Occasionally
“Meal-times gives are enjoyable for everyone” Quite often/mostly Never/Occasionally
How easy or difficult is child to feed? Very/fairly easy Neither easy nor difficult Fairly/very difficult

<i>Variable reference categories in italics</i>		SW3	SW3
Toddler Cohort at 58 months (SW3)		One or less veg./day (N:2177)	Usually eats unhealthy snacks (N:2177)
[Also controls for: Maternal Education, Mother's Age, Mother's ethnicity, Family composition, child's birth order, child gender]		Odds Ratios	Odds Ratios
How often child eats with parent & family (SW1-34 months) (<i>Every day/most days</i>)	Twice a week/less often/never	0.704	1.151
How often child eats with parent & family (SW3-58 months) (<i>Every day/most days</i>)	Twice a week/less often/never	0.820	0.825
How often child has meals at regular times (<i>Always</i>)	Usually/sometimes/never	1.214	1.170
How often child eats same food as parent for main meal (<i>Always/almost always</i>)	Sometimes	1.998 ^{***}	1.272 [*]
	Never, almost never	3.291 ^{***}	1.375
Where child usually eats main meal (<i>Kitchen, dining room, living room-dining room</i>)	Other room	0.924	1.379 [*]
Days last week that child ate take-away meal (e.g. fish & chips) (<i>Once or less</i>)	Twice or more	1.246	1.536
Days last week child ate main meal made using fresh ingredients (<i>5-7 times</i>)	4 times or less	1.562 ^{***}	1.323 [*]
"Meal-times are a rush" (<i>Never/Occasionally</i>)	Quite often/mostly	1.272	1.078
"Meal-times give us time to talk to each other" (<i>Never/Occasionally</i>)	Quite often/mostly	0.719 [*]	0.720 [*]
"Meal-times gives are enjoyable for everyone" (<i>Never/Occasionally</i>)	Quite often/mostly	0.950	0.916
How easy or difficult is child to feed? (<i>Very/fairly easy</i>)	Neither easy nor difficult	1.746 ^{***}	1.234
	Fairly/very difficult	2.900 ^{***}	0.880



What the numbers say?



- The less often children eat meals with their parents, the more likely they are to eat few vegetables, and the more likely they are to eat unhealthy snacks
- In families where mealtimes are seen as a time to talk to each other, children eat more vegetables and fewer unhealthy snacks between meals.
- Children who don't eat veg are fussy!

What does this mean?

Toddlers' experiences of meals and eating within the context of family life help to attribute social meaning to food. Ultimately, children are exposed to a process of continuous regulation and civilisation by parents (Elias, 1982; Turner, 1987; Turner, 1992). Part of this civilisation process involves parents knowingly or unknowingly socialising their children into adopting their own socially constructed meanings of food and eating (Mead, 1949). The family meal, or the absence of it, is one realm through which this socialisation can occur.

It would be simplistic to presume that children who grow up with a preference for unhealthy foods are being driven by 'innate' bodily urges, and have failed to be nurtured into 'eating for health'. Rather than invoking the classic nature vs. nurture dichotomy (Moore, 2003), it could be argued that differences in children's dietary habits are a result of a nurture vs. nurture dichotomy. That is to say that children acquire a *taste* (Bourdieu, 1984) for either healthy or unhealthy food through a process of socialisation which commences at birth, if not before that, and continues to shape their preferences



Positives

- Crucial development stages during first 5 years
- Continuously growing dataset (and growing children!)
- Data keeping up to date with policy developments
- Great breadth of data

Thank You!

Valeria Skafida

valeria.skafida@ed.ac.uk

