

## Abstract

# Current Trends in Eating Habits of Serbian Adolescents—Data from a Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children Study in Serbia <sup>†</sup>

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<sup>†</sup> Presented at the 14th European Nutrition Conference FENS 2023, Belgrade, Serbia, 14–17 November 2023.

**Abstract:** Background and aim: Adolescence is a nutritionally vulnerable life phase. Poor eating habits formed during adolescence can lead to obesity and diet-related diseases in later years. The adoption of healthy eating habits is of particular importance, not only because of the direct impact on growth and development at this age, but also because of the impact on health in adulthood. A change in dietary habits in adolescence is marked by a higher intake of soft drinks, sweets, and salty snacks, with a decrease in the intake of vegetables, fruits, and milk and dairy products. The aim of this study was to show current trends in the eating habits of Serbian adolescents. Method: This study comprised a secondary analysis of data collected from 11–15-year-old students who participated in two cross-sectional Health Behaviour in School-aged Children Surveys (HBSC), conducted in Serbia in 2018 and 2022. Data on breakfast consumption and the intake of fruit, vegetables, soft drinks, and sweets were analyzed. Results: About two thirds of students (67.7%) in 2022 were eating breakfast every day during the working week, significantly more than in 2018 (58.8%), with no gender differences. The number of students who never eat breakfast during the working week is increasing (7.5% in 2018, 9.9% in 2022), with the highest numbers in the oldest age group. When it comes to the intake of fruit and vegetables, students do not meet the recommendations: in 2022, less than half of the students consumed fruit and vegetables once a day or more (39.6% fruit, 39.7% vegetables), while the frequency of a daily intake of fruits and vegetables decreased with age. The results show a decrease in daily consumption in comparison to 2018. Less than one fifth of students in 2022 consumed soft drinks daily (18.8%), boys more often than girls (21.5% vs. 16.4%), significantly less than in 2018 (22.4%). The consumption of soft drinks increases with age. More than a third of adolescents in 2022 ate sweets once a day or more often (34.8%), girls more often than boys (38.7% vs. 30.3%). This consumption has not changed since 2018. Conclusions: The findings of this study indicate a need for a more intensive nutrition-related health education of adolescents in order to improve their eating habits.



**Citation:** Gudelj Rakic, J.; Kilibarda, B.; Vasic, M.; Jovanovic, V. Current Trends in Eating Habits of Serbian Adolescents—Data from a Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children Study in Serbia. *Proceedings* **2023**, *91*, 52. <https://doi.org/10.3390/proceedings2023091052>

Academic Editors: Sladjana Sobajic and Philip Calder

Published: 17 November 2023



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**Keywords:** adolescents; eating habits; Serbia

**Author Contributions:** Conceptualization, J.G.R.; methodology, J.G.R. and B.K.; software, B.K.; formal analysis, J.G.R., B.K. and M.V.; investigation, J.G.R., B.K., M.V. and V.J.; resources, J.G.R. and B.K.; data curation, M.V. and V.J.; writing—original draft preparation, J.G.R. and V.J.; writing—review and editing J.G.R., B.K. and M.V.; visualization, J.G.R. and M.V.; supervision, V.J.; project administration, J.G.R. and V.J.; funding acquisition, V.J. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Institutional Review Board Statement:** Anonymized data used for this secondary analysis were obtained through the Health Behavior in School-Aged Children Study (HBSC) conducted in Serbia. HBSC study in Serbia was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Institute of Public Health of Serbia *Dr Milan Jovanović Batut* (protocol code 955/1 from 31.3.2022).

**Informed Consent Statement:** NA (anonymized data were used for secondary analysis).

**Data Availability Statement:** Databases with the anonymized data are available upon request and are subject of the approval of the Ethics Committee of the Institute of Public Health of Serbia *Dr Milan Jovanović Batut*.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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