

School based dietary intervention among teenagers

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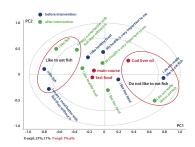


Figure 1. Correlation loadings describing the relationship between consumption and attitudes related to fish consumption



Students at the canteen

Introduction

Longevity and good health in Iceland is considered to be partly due to high fish consumption. Studies have shown that eating fish at least once or twice a week is beneficial to health and food based dietary guidelines of the Public Health Institute of Iceland include a recommendation to eat fish at least twice a week. However during the last decades fish consumption has decreased, particularly among teenage girls.

The aim of this intervention study was to find out if fish consumption could be increased among teenagers and their attitude towards fish improved trough education and increased availability of fish.

Methods

The intervention took place in a community college in Northern Iceland over a six month period. Students' age was 16-20 yrs. The number of fish meals offered at the school canteen was increased and lectures were given to students on the health benefit of consuming fish. The students (N=220 (73% of the total number of students)) answered a questionnaire before and after the intervention, including questions on attitudes towards health and food, consumption frequency of foods, likes and dislikes towards various fish dishes, factors affecting fish consumption and knowledge about fish.

Results and Discussion

At the end of the intervention, knowledge about fish had increased, but attitude towards fish had become more negative than before the intervention. Likewise, the frequency of fish consumption increased according to the number of fish meals sold in the canteen, but no difference was found in reported frequency by the students themselves, mean frequency was 1,8 before and 1,9 at the end of intervention. However, consumption of cod liver oil almost doubled (from 1.7 to 3,3 times a week), more among girls than boys. Also the results revealed that those who didn't like fish increased their cod liver oil consumption after the intervention (Figure 1). These results underline the challenges facing public health interventions among teenagers and the importance of including young people themselves in the preparation and design of an intervention.

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