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Title: Is that ‘*khaja*’? Defining snacks for young children in Kathmandu Valley, Nepal

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Background and Objectives:

Healthy snacks can be an important source of energy/nutrients and are recommended in most guidelines for young child feeding. While WHO/PAHO defines snacks as ‘foods eaten between meals’, recent reviews show a range of definitions for snacks, including: time of consumption, portion size, or food type. This qualitative study assessed how snacks are defined among caregivers of young children in Nepal.



Methods:

Seven focus-group discussion (FGDs) among 32 primary caregivers of children 12-23 months and 10 structured-observations of children were conducted in Kathmandu Valley. FGDs included a guided discussion on caregivers’ definitions of snacks (*khaja*) and participatory exercises based on behavior-centered design. For structured observations, children were observed for a 12-hour period, with details noted for feeding episodes.

Results:

- Participants defined *khaja* in comparison to main meals (*khana*),
- *Khaja* portion sizes for adults are smaller than meals, while portion sizes for children are often similar to meals
- Observations of child feeding found that snacks were served in similar or larger portions than meals.
- Caregivers fed snacks to children throughout the day to ‘keep something in the belly’
- Foods identified as snack foods (biscuits and instant noodles) were sometimes fed as meals

Conclusions:

- Nepali caregivers define snacks as foods/beverages fed between meals, however, this definition was inconsistent in practice
- Snack definitions common in guidelines may not be appropriate when considering diet quality for young children
- Focusing on types of foods may be more appropriate than consideration of portion size or consumption time
- Further research is needed to understand how varying snack definitions relate to children’s overall dietary adequacy

Keywords:

snacks, IYCF, Nepal, nutrition, dietary assessment

Conflict of Interest:

None