



ORIGINAL

Food practices in children of the “Casa Hogar de Jesús” in Santo Domingo

Prácticas alimentarias en niños de la “Casa Hogar de Jesús” en Santo Domingo

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Cite as: Loor Andrade DM, Machuca Castro AN, Merino Zúñiga RK, Chávez-Arizala JF. Food practices in children of the “Casa Hogar de Jesús” in Santo Domingo. Perspectiva Austral. 2025; 3:57. <https://doi.org/10.56294/pa202557>

Submitted: 04-03-2024

Revised: 17-06-2024

Accepted: 22-09-2024

Published: 23-2025

Editor: Dr. William Castillo-González 

ABSTRACT

Introduction: the dietary practice in children is in line with the need that food intake must meet the daily needs that life and physical activity demand.

Objective: to determine the level of dietary practices of children aged 5 to 16 years at the Casa Hogar de Jesús.

Method: a quantitative, observational, descriptive and prospective study was carried out to measure the number of children at the “Hogar de Jesús” House who presented an adequate level of dietary procedures and, at the same time, to know the estimate of people at risk due to inadequate practices during the year 2024. A study sample of 50 children between 5 and 16 years old was determined by simple random sampling.

Results: 34 % of the sample was between 8 and 10 years old, 54 % rated their health level as very good, 100 % ate meat twice a week, 100 % of the sample said they ate vegetables three times a week, 100 % of the study participants stated that they do not consume artificial drinks, 90 % indicated that they do not consume pacifiers, and 100 % of the participants consumed fruit.

Conclusions: a state of good health and adequate nutrition is revealed among the children of the “Casa Hogar de Jesús” in Santo Domingo, maintaining diets rich in healthy products of animal and vegetable origin.

Keywords: Child Welfare; Child Development; Motivation; Nutrition.

RESUMEN

Introducción: la práctica alimentaria en niños se apega a la necesidad con la que la ingesta de alimentos debe satisfacer las necesidades diarias que demandan la vida y la actividad física.

Objetivo: determinar el nivel de las prácticas alimentarias de los niños de 5 a 16 años de la Casa Hogar de Jesús.

Método: se realizó un estudio cuantitativo, observacional, descriptivo y prospectivo para medir la cantidad de niños de la Casa “Hogar de Jesús” que presentaron un nivel adecuado de procedimientos alimentarios y, al mismo tiempo, conocer el estimado de personas en riesgo debido a prácticas inadecuadas durante el año 2024. Se determinó una muestra de estudio de 50 niños entre 5 y 16 años mediante un muestreo simple aleatorio.

Resultados: el 34 % de la muestra correspondía al rango de 8 a 10 años, el 54 %, calificó su nivel de salud como muy bueno, el 100 % lo consumía carnes dos veces por semana, el 100 % de la muestra expresó comer verduras tres veces a la semana, el 100 % de los participantes en el estudio afirmaron que no consumen bebidas artificiales, el 90 % indicó que no consumen chupetes, se visualizaron que el 100 % de los participantes consume frutas.

Conclusiones: se revela un estado de buena salud y adecuada alimentación entre los niños de la “Casa Hogar de Jesús” en Santo Domingo, manteniendo dietas ricas en productos saludables de origen animal y vegetal

Palabras clave: Bienestar de la Infancia; Desarrollo del Niño; Motivación; Nutrición.

INTRODUCTION

Nutrition, besides being the basis of a set of eating habits, is attached to the need with which food intake should meet the daily needs that life and physical activity demand, also providing additional nutrients for the construction of bones, the contribution to tissues and organs thus demonstrating the importance of nutrition, to achieve correct eating practices that should be taken into consideration when performing daily routines, for optimal expansion and training of children, where their anthropometric measurements are considered in addition to their cognitive constitution.⁽¹⁾

As pointed out by the National Institute of Statistics and Census (INEC), in Ecuador, 1 % of children under two years of age are shown with Chronic Childhood malnutrition; the provinces with the highest levels of ICD are Chimborazo with 35,1 %, Bolivar with 30,3 % and Santa Elena with 29,8 %. At the same time, the provinces with the lowest ICD rates are El Oro at 9,8 %, Sucumbíos at 13,3 %, and Los Ríos at 14,4 %. Sadly, in cities such as Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas, there are no statistics with sufficient evidence to know how the population, in general, is at the level of the food plan and even more in its surrounding sectors here, including the place where it is required to raise the food practices project.⁽²⁾

The Health Organization (PAHO) mentions that in Latin America, 22,5 % of individuals cannot have access to good food because of scarce resources; in the Caribbean region, the percentage of people affected by this crisis is 52 %; on the other hand, Mesoamerica has a lower percentage of 27,8 %, followed by South America with 18,4 %. The number of people going through a hunger crisis is increasing daily; in South America, it was stated that approximately 11 million people are going through this crisis, and the percentages studied show that Mesoamerica has 8,4 % and the Caribbean 16,4 %.⁽³⁾

The Ministry of Public Health (MSP) mentions that some individuals in charge of children should wash their hands before preparing food and children's hands before eating. Food should be preserved and stored safely and served immediately after preparation. This allows food practices to be excellent and efficient, given that food intake is essential for the individual to remain healthy in a comprehensive manner since adequate food allows them to maintain their optimal conditions, and, therefore, their development and skills will be significant, thereby promoting an increase in their health condition.⁽⁴⁾

The assessment of nutritional status is based on a set of means used to describe an individual's nutritional status and assess their nutritional requirements. It shows us that the nutritional assessment and its status allows the individual to know the degree to which their diet is and details to know what their deficiencies are and also improve and thus solve their problems and to measure, identify, in order to make an assessment of performance and thus be able to monitor the state nutritional progress, confirming, as well as it is and assess the levels of nutrition either favorable or unfavorable. This process is essential to monitor and, in turn, carry a permanent and constant plan for managing good nutrition; it is accompanied by physical assessment and dietary history, among other factors.⁽⁵⁾

In the challenging and exciting world of gastronomy and the symphony of exuberant flavors and harmonious colors, one longs to show a creation where the magical colors and flavors merge, harmonizing a dish that evokes health, contrasts with love in each bite that, in addition to how incredible it is before the eyes, it is still a standard that tells us the proportion of carbohydrates, proteins, and vegetables. The same must provide balance, exquisiteness, and neatness and evoke the sensations of the most subtle palates, such as children.⁽⁶⁾

Therefore, the objective of this article is to determine the level of food practices of children from 5 to 16 years of age at the Casa Hogar de Jesús.

METHOD

A quantitative, observational, descriptive, and prospective study was carried out to measure the number of children in the "Hogar de Jesús" home, which presented an adequate level of eating procedures, and, at the same time, to know the estimated number of people at risk due to inadequate practices during the year 2024.

A study sample of 50 children between 5 and 16 years old was determined by simple random sampling.

Inclusion criteria: children between 5 and 16 years of age from the Casa Hogar de Jesús, Santo Domingo, were included in the study.

Exclusion criteria: children not wanting to participate voluntarily in the study, children not authorized under informed consent by the foundation's coordinator, and children not part of the "Casa Hogar de Jesús" Foundation.

In this research on food practices in children of the "Casa Hogar de Jesus" in Santo Domingo in 2024, observation and survey techniques were used. According to Ruiz (2019), it is a "set of techniques and tools to evaluate a phenomenon, an individual or a group of people.

The questionnaire "Food practices in children of the Casa Hogar de Jesús, Santo Domingo 2023", designed by researchers Looor Diana and Machuca Alisson specifically to evaluate and understand the food practices of children in this particular environment, was used; the instrument consists of 14 questions distributed in five dimensions. These questionnaires provided detailed data on the eating practices of the children in the center, and the data collected was transferred to an Excel file for further analysis.

This research considered the ethical values of protecting and defending the integrity of the children surveyed.

RESULTS

The table 1 shows that 34 % of the sample corresponded to 8 to 10 years, 30 % from 5 to 7 years, 22 % from 11 to 13 years, and 14 % from 14 to 16 years.

Table 1. Distribution according to age groups		
Age	N°	%
from 5 to 7 years old	15	30
from 8 to 10 years old	17	34
from 11 to 13 years old	11	22
from 14 to 16 years old	7	14
Total	50	100

The table 2 shows that more than half of the respondents, 54 %, rated their level of health as very good.

Table 2. Distribution according to body mass index		
	n	%
Low Weight	0	0
Normal Weight	50	100
Overweight	0	0
Obese	0	0

Table 3. Distribution according to perception of health and nutritional status												
Perception of health status	Bad		Regular		Good		Very good		Excellent		Total	
	N°	%	N°	%	N°	%	N°	%	N°	%	N°	%
Health status	0	0	0	0	0	0	27	54	23	46	50	100
Perception of food	0	0	0	0	0	0	25	50	25	50	50	100

Regarding the consumption of chicken, 100 % consumed it twice a week; beef, 100 % twice a week; fish, 100 % twice a week; pork 100 % twice a week; liver, 100 % three times a week; eggs, 100 % three times a week, table 4.

Table 4. Distribution according to frequency of consumption of foods of animal origin												
	Once		Twice		Three times		Every day		Never		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Chicken	0	0	50	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Beef	0	0	50	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	100
Fish	0	0	50	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	100
Pig	0	0	50	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	100
Liver	0	0	0	0	50	100	0	0	0	0	50	100
Tuna	0	0	50	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	100
Eggs	0	0	0	0	50	100	0	0	0	0	50	100
Shrimp	50	100	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	50	100
Sausages	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	50	100	50	100

In relation to vegetables, 100 % of the sample expressed eating broccoli three times a week; carrots, 100 % three times a week; spinach, 100 % three times a week, table 5.

Table 5. Distribution according to the frequency of vegetable consumption												
	Once		Twice		Three times		Every day		Never		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Broccoli	0	0	0	0	50	100	0	0	0	0	50	100
Carrot	0	0	0	0	50	100	0	0	0	0	50	100

Spinach	0	0	0	0	50	100	0	0	0	0	50	100
Menestras	50	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	50	100
Banana	0	0	0	0	50	100	0	0	0	0	50	100
Yucca	0	0	0	0	50	100	0	0	0	0	50	100
Pumpkin	0	0	0	0	50	100	0	0	0	0	50	100
Beets	0	0	50	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	50	100
Onion	0	0	0	0	50	100	0	0	0	0	50	100
Tomato	0	0	0	0	50	100	0	0	0	0	50	100

The table 6 shows that, in relation to dairy products, 100 % indicated consuming cheese twice a day; milk, 100 % twice a day; yogurt, 100 % twice a day.

Table 6. Distribution according to dairy consumption												
	Once		Twice		Three times		Every day		Never		Total	
	N°	%	N°	%	N°	%	N°	%	N°	%	N°	%
Cheese	0	0	50	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	50	100
Milk	0	0	50	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	50	100
Yogurt	0	0	50	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	50	100
Butter	0	0	50	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	50	100
Milk cream	50	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	50	100
Condensed milk	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	50	100	50	100

In relation to natural beverages, 100 % indicated consuming water every day, and 100 % also consumed natural juices three times a day.

Table 7. Distribution according to consumption of natural beverages										
	Twice		Three times		Every day		Never		Total	
	N°	%	N°	%	N°	%	N°	%	N°	%
Water	0	0	0	0	50	100	0	0	50	100
Natural juices	0	0	50	100	0	0	0	0	50	100

The table 8 shows that 100 % of the participants in the study stated that they do not consume artificial beverages.

Table 8. Distribution according to consumption of artificial beverages										
	Twice		Three times		Every day		Never		Total	
	N°	%	N°	%	N°	%	N°	%	N°	%
Packaged juices	0	0	0	0	0	0	50	100	50	100
Soft drinks	0	0	0	0	0	0	50	100	50	100

In relation to the consumption of sweets, 90 % indicated that they do not consume pacifiers as opposed to 10 % who consume them twice a week, 100 % do not consume chocolates or candies (table 9).

Table 9. Distribution according to candy consumption										
	Twice		Three times		Every day		Never		Total	
	N°	%	N°	%	N°	%	N°	%	N°	%
Pacifiers	5	10	0	0	0	0	45	88	49	100
Chocolates	0	0	0	0	0	0	50	100	50	100
Candies	0	0	0	0	0	0	50	100	50	100
Ice cream	2	4	0	0	0	0	48	96	50	100
Cookies	20	40	0	0	0	0	30	60	50	100

About food and dietary habits based on the frequency of consumption of junk food, it is noteworthy to highlight a fascinating phenomenon; it was found that 100 % of the group of individuals do not consume this type of food during the week, table 10.

Table 10. Distribution according to consumption of junk food										
	Twice		Three times		Every day		Never		Total	
	N°	%	N°	%	N°	%	N°	%	N°	%
Pizza	0	0	0	0	0	0	50	100	50	100
Hamburg	0	0	0	0	0	0	50	100	50	100
Salchipapa	0	0	0	0	0	0	50	100	50	100
Corn mix	0	0	0	0	0	0	50	100	50	100
Papipollo	0	0	0	0	0	0	50	100	50	100
Hot dog	0	0	0	0	0	0	50	100	50	100

Regarding the frequency of fruit consumption, 100 % of the participants consumed apples, pears, oranges, grapes, pineapple, and grenadine thrice weekly. Likewise, 100 % of the sample consumes bananas and strawberries twice a week, table 11.

Table 11. Distribution according to fruit consumption										
	Twice		Three times		Every day		Never		Total	
	N°	%	N°	%	N°	%	N°	%	N°	%
Apple	0	0	50	100	0	0	0	0	50	100
Pear	0	0	50	100	0	0	0	0	50	100
Guineo	50	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	50	100
Orange	0	0	50	100	0	0	0	0	50	100
Strawberries	50	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	50	100
Grapes	0	0	50	100	0	0	0	0	50	100
Pineapple	0	0	50	100	0	0	0	0	50	100
Granadilla	0	0	50	100	0	0	0	0	50	100

With respect to hygiene practices, a study was conducted, where 100 % of the sample adhered to the essential practice of washing hands before ingesting food (table 12).

Table 12. Distribution according to hygiene practices									
Indicators	YES		NO		Sometimes		Total		
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Hand washing	50	100	0	0	0	0	50	100	

Regarding the willingness to acquire knowledge, 100 % of the respondents answered that they would like to learn something new through training.

Table 13. Willingness to acquire knowledge									
Indicators	YES		NO		Sometimes		Total		
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Knowledge of food practices	50	100	0	0	0	0	50	100	
Knowledge about healthy foods	50	100	0	0	0	0	50	100	

DISCUSSION

The importance of nutrition in childhood and its impact on athletic performance highlights that proper nutrition from an early age is fundamental for children's physical and cognitive development and academic performance. This finding underscores the importance of providing nutrition education in family environments and educational institutions, emphasizing the relevance of adopting healthy dietary practices from infancy to promote optimal growth and development.⁽⁷⁾

Campo-Ternera L et al.⁽⁸⁾ in their study of healthy lifestyles of children and adolescents with a sample of 991

students aged between seven and seventeen years, have. As a result, 71,6 % were overweight, and 56,7 % had an average body mass index, while Russo S⁽⁹⁾ obtained results with 40 % of children overweight and 20 % with obesity; therefore, they do not have a good perception of health.

Healthy eating is essential to prevent all forms of malnutrition and conditions such as diabetes, cancer, and other non-communicable diseases. This study approach showed us the significant care and the application of awareness that they have in Casa Hogar de Jesús for the welfare and good nutrition with which the habits in the diet of the children are managed, thus highlighting how important it is to have good management in the integral care of each child, with professionals and a good working team at the time of its execution.⁽¹⁰⁾

There is a higher frequency of consumption of plant foods than animal foods. Vegetable foods are consumed three times a week, while animal foods are consumed twice weekly. As for fruits, the most consumed are apples, pears, oranges, grapes, pineapples, and grenadillas, with a weekly consumption of three times, which is related to 100 % of the respondents, except for bananas, which were the least consumed.⁽¹¹⁾

Landaeta-Jiménez et al.⁽¹²⁾ in their original article, sought to contribute with information on some factors that affect food and nutrition, reflecting alarming results due to the absence of foods that are of vital importance for their micro and macronutrients, leading to a deficient diet.

Pineda D et al.⁽¹³⁾ in their evaluation of the dietary pattern in children, detailing the objectives and sample, presented figures from 6,67 % of stunting, without global and acute malnutrition, as well as 10 % are affected by the risk of overweight, and with 80 % report, being well according to anthropometric parameters and indicators. A healthy and balanced diet and an active lifestyle are crucial to preventing non-communicable metabolic diseases.

According to WHO, a healthy diet for children should include fruits, vegetables, protein, healthy fats, and complex carbohydrates. Adopting a diet that includes at least five servings of fruits and vegetables per day is an effective strategy to promote optimal overall health and prevent chronic diseases. In addition, encouraging this habit from an early age can establish a solid foundation for healthy eating patterns.⁽¹⁰⁾

In this sense, the sample points to good eating habits since their intake is of natural origin, it is commendable to applaud the joint work of the sponsors, dietitian nutritionist, caregivers, and all the trained and dedicated staff for the welfare of children in this place, thus taking advantage of the donations that are basic for them, the optimal use that children have and the disciplined commitment to stay well.

Unprocessed foods stand out in a generalized way without generating doubts in the healthy category. They are considered as such because they have not been subjected to industrial processes, which is why these foods provide many nutrients necessary to ingest correctly. They are commonly known as fresh or natural foods since they have not been affected in their natural state or process. They give rise to physical changes that alter their texture, aroma, flavor, and color obtained from nature without additives or preservatives.⁽¹³⁾

The benefits that can be considered in good dietary practices relevant to children begin with the objective of improving their quality of life; this involves physical condition, maintaining a healthy weight, and achieving healthy growth and development of the individual. It highlights several factors that affect optimal development, assuming good hygiene practices, food, emotional state, and nutritional status, comprehensively making the individual well. They are also an accumulation of fundamental principles to follow, rules, and standards at each stage of feeding, from the intake of the first breast milk to the time of solid intake and a combination of foods.⁽¹⁴⁾

Hand hygiene saves millions of lives each year when performed at the right time and in the right way. Removing germs from the hands reduces the risk of diarrheal diseases and respiratory infections. It can prevent the spread of foodborne and skin diseases such as scabies, a highly contagious disease that helps prevent the spread, as well as proper hand washing of hepatitis and other communicable diseases. This is why the priority need for persuasive knowledge of hand washing with soap and water is emphasized, as well as performing the correct movements according to the type of washing and the times to use this healthy practice properly.⁽¹⁰⁾

As for identifying the level of willingness to learn new knowledge about food practices of children from 5 to 16 years of age at Casa Hogar de Jesús, all of them agree to learn, which is relevant, especially because children and adolescents are at a crucial stage of their cognitive and social development. Their capacity and willingness to learn new concepts are generally high, and food practices and nutrition are vital areas in which education can have a significant impact. Learning about healthy and sustainable eating early can lay the foundation for healthy eating habits throughout life, crucial for preventing food-related health problems such as obesity, malnutrition, and chronic diseases. Dietary education adapted to their developmental level, with the support of the environment and the active participation of caregivers, can promote healthy and sustainable eating habits. This behavior indicates adequate education and awareness about personal hygiene, and teaching children the importance of hand washing promotes their current health and establishes lifelong hygiene habits.

In this regard, handwashing is highlighted as a central issue in global public health, especially in the context of infectious diseases, and it should be kept in mind that there are places where there is unequal access to adequate handwashing facilities. This practice is essential not only for personal protection but also to prevent the spread of disease to others, especially in communities and households.

CONCLUSIONS

A state of good health and adequate nutrition is revealed among the children of the “Casa Hogar de Jesús” in Santo Domingo, maintaining diets rich in healthy products of animal and vegetable origin and avoiding the consumption of processed or artificial foods, which translates into a healthy diet.

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FINANCING

The authors did not receive funding for the development of this research.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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