



**Leading education
and social research**

Institute of Education
University of London

*ESRC Research Methods Festival, St Catherine's
College Oxford, 30th June to 3rd July*

Session 55: Interpretive synthesis

Thematic synthesis

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Thematic Synthesis*

- Line by line coding
- Comparing & grouping codes
- Descriptive themes
- Analytical themes

See: Thomas J, Harden A (in press) Methods for the thematic synthesis of qualitative research in systematic reviews. *BMC Medical Research Methodology

An example of thematic analysis for synthesis

Children and healthy eating: a systematic review of barriers and facilitators*

***Thomas J, Sutcliffe K, Harden A, Oakley A, Oliver S, Rees R, Brunton G, Kavanagh J (2003a) *Children and Healthy Eating: A systematic review of barriers and facilitators*. London: EPPI-Centre, Social Science Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London (The full report of this review is available at the EPPI-Centre website <http://eppi.ioe.ac.uk/EPPIWeb/home.aspx>)**

Review questions

What is known about the barriers to, and facilitators of, healthy eating amongst children?

Do interventions promote healthy eating amongst children?

What are children's perspectives on healthy eating?

What are the implications of the above for intervention development?

REVIEW PROCESS

Searching, screening and mapping

**Focus narrowed to
'fruit &veg'**

Synthesis 1: Trials (n=33)

1. Quality assessment
2. Data extraction
3. Statistical meta-analysis

Synthesis 2: 'Views' studies (n=8)

1. Quality assessment
2. Data extraction
3. Thematic synthesis

**Synthesis 3: Trials and
'views'**

Thematic synthesis

Stage 1 and 2: Coding text and developing descriptive themes

Stage 3: Generating analytical themes

Stage 1 and stage 2

Data were author descriptions of study findings

Line-by-line coding applied to data

- **36 initial *descriptive codes* (e.g. *bad foods = nice; good foods = awful*)**

Looked for similarities and differences among *descriptive codes* in order to group them

- **13 *descriptive themes* (e.g. 'Perceptions of health benefits')**

Line-by-line coding in EPPI-Reviewer

EPPI-Reviewer 3.0

Inductive coding: code

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Coding text for item: *Dixey R; Sahota P; Atwal S; Turner A; (2001) Children talking about healthy eating: Data from focus groups with 300 9-11-year-olds* ([click here to change item and/or text](#))

as a legitimate use of their money and thought parents should buy this.

*Children did not identify friends as an influence on their healthy eating

'Children were well aware of the pressures on them (to be healthy) and of the contradictions in their own behaviour, and knew that they did not always act on what they knew to be healthy: 'When they (the Apples project) come round, you think right, I'm going to get healthy now, but when you get home, you get something out of the fridge or something' (Boys, Year 6); 'At home I just nip into the biscuit tin.' (Boys, year 5)' p.74 - e.g. temptation 'All the things that are bad for you are nice, and all the things that are good for you are awful' (Boys, year 6) p.74 Problems with school dinners - 'But once you go down for the school dinners it's a different story, because you've got all your fattening foods' (Boys, Year 6) p.74 Some children reported throwing away foods they knew had been put in because they were 'good for you' and only ate the crisps and chocolate. Influence of advertising - reported keenness to emulate footballer Alan Shearer by eating at MacDonalds 'My brother says we have to go to there because Alan Shearer has been there.' (Girls, year 5) 'People think 'I want to be like Alan Shearer so I better go to MacDonalds.' (Boys, year 6) Children said that adverts made them 'feel hungry' and were particularly

Text to code:

 [Create new code](#)

[-] Understandings of healthy eating

[-] Influences on foods chosen

[-] Provided foods

[-] Chosen foods

[-] Food preferences

[-] Perceptions of health benefits

[-] bad food = nice, good food = awful

[-] Roles and responsibilities

[-] Knowledge - behaviour gap

[-] Non-influencing factors

Code selected text

Remove this code from selected text

Show text coded with this code

Delete this code

Add sub-code here

Reports

Properties...

You are logged in as: James Thomas

Review: Children and Healthy Eating: A systematic review of barriers and facilitators

Database: EPIC

IT11953 Dixey - Document Browser

Browser Document Edit View Format Links Coding

IT11953 Dixey

Normal Times New Roman 10 Black

Details

Authors reported influences rather than barriers or facilitators

Influences on food choices outside the school included *advertising - there was a high awareness of food adverts from TV and magazines and it generated much discussion. They were able to recognise and discuss adverts for unhealthy and healthy foods(e.g. 'All adverts for healthy stuff go on about healthy things, the adverts for unhealthy things tell you how nice they taste'(p75)). Although children could readily identify the ploys used in adverts to get them eat certain things and they felt they were not personally influenced by it (just after your money); many did enjoy the foods targeted at them and enjoyed going to places like burger bars

*parents and the home environment - children perceived parents to be a key influence. They reported positive and negative sanctions (e.g. getting sent to bed if they don't eat veg), but some reported a more positive environment whereby parents healthier choices influenced the children

*Friends were less of an influence 'we don't talk about it' (p74), but sharing sweets and eating at each other's houses did come up.

*Disposable cash - children saw pocket money as a way to buy sweets. They did not see using this money to buy healthy foods as a legitimate use of their money and thought parents should buy this

*Children did not identify friends as an influence on their healthy eating

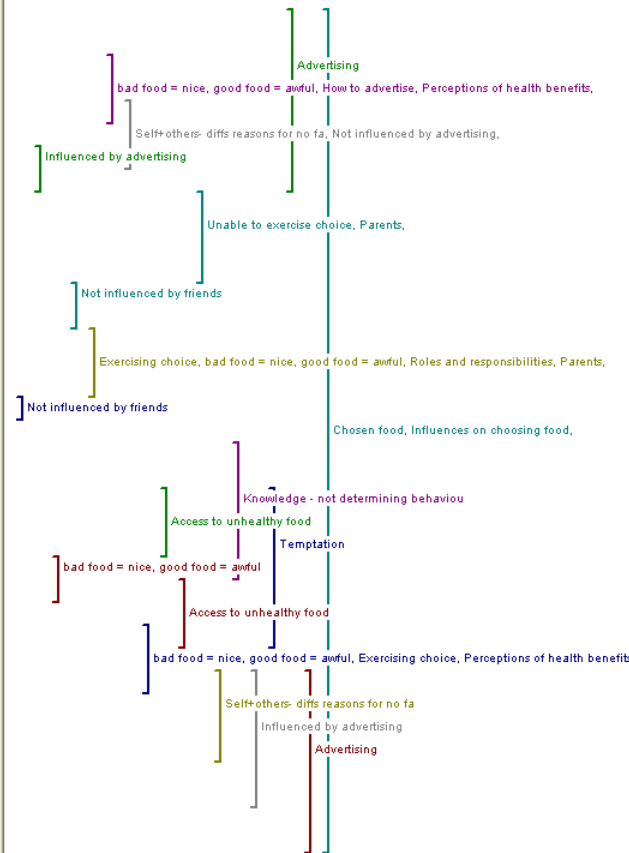
'Children were well aware of the pressures on them (to be healthy) and of the contradictions in their own behaviour, and knew that they did not always act on what they knew to be healthy.'When they (the Apples project) come round, you think right, I'm going to get healthy now, but when you get home, you get something out of the fridge or something' (Boys, Year 6); 'At home I just nip into the biscuit tin' (Boys, year 5)' p.74 - e.g. temptation 'All the things that are bad for you are nice, and all the things that are good for you are awful' (Boys, year 6) p.74Problems with school dinners - 'But once you go down for the school dinners it's a different story, because you've got all your fattenin foods' (Boys, Year 6) p.74some children reported throwing away foods they knew had been put in because they were 'good for you' and only ate the crisps and chocolate Influence of advertising - reported keenness to emulate footballer Alan Shearer by eating at MacDonalds 'My brother says we have to go to there because Alan Shearer has been there.' (Girls, year 5) 'People think I want to be like Alan Shearer so I better go to MacDonalds.' (Boys, year 6)Children said that adverts made them 'feel hungry' and were particularly keen on those portraying footballers and burgers, or 'Snickers and the England Team' 'All adverts for healthy stuff go on about healthy things, the adverts for unhealthy stuff tell you how nice it tastes.' p.75having pocket money 'having pocket money to spend was seen as a major reason for consuming sweets' p.75

What do children think helps them to eat healthily?

Details

Authors reported influences rather than barriers or facilitators

Descriptive codes in NVivo



IT11953 Dixey - Coder

Show: All Nodes, Explorer Style

Scope of coding: Document

Recently Used

- Free (36)
- age differences
- bad food = nice, good food = awful
- Children understand balance
- Concepts of authors
- Consequences of fat in diet
- Consequences of not eating healthy
- Consequences of sugar in diet
- Context of eating
- Disliked food
- Favourite food
- Future vs immediate consequences
- gender difference
- Good food is natural food
- Health reasons for not being healthy ~good for you~ food
- Healthy diet = conscious of health
- Healthy diet = low fat
- Importance of taste
- Influences on choosing food
- Knowledge vs behaviour
- Meanings of good and bad food
- Mothers views
- Parental food rules
- Prefer fruit to veg
- Relative fruit preferences
- Relative veg preferences
- Self+others- diffs reasons for not being healthy
- Social reasons for not being healthy
- Socio-economic differences
- Sweets as rewards
- Unhealthy ~bad for you~ food
- Universal approval of unhealthy food
- We should eat less of —
- We should eat more of —

Find

Code UnCode

Working Set

Add Node(s) Remove All

Axial coding

EPPI-Reviewer 3.0

Inductive coding: code

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Dixey et al (2001)

Characters: 463 to 978

Children were aware of the relationship between diet and health, in particular for health consequences in the future (main health consequence of not eating healthily was identified as heart disease, although a minority mentioned cancer), although some children did recognise the importance of healthy eating so that they could do things now ('move and run about'). Fat also featured heavily in children's accounts of heart disease (e.g. 'too many crisps means too much fat which blocks the arteries of the heart').

Characters: 982 to 1079

Children identified social as well as health concerns as important reasons for not being too fat

Baxter et al (2000)

Characters: -1 to 180

James
This study addresses the more specific questions of what are children's perceptions of fruit and vegetables. The children's likes and dislikes with regard to vegetables may r />

Characters: 195 to 417

Text to code:

[Create new code](#)

[-] Understandings of healthy eating

[-] Influences on foods chosen

[-] Chosen foods

[-] Roles and responsibilities

[-] Food preferences

[-] Knowledge - behaviour gap

[-] Health benefits

[-] Non-influencing factors

[-] Provided food

[-] Another new code

Code selected text

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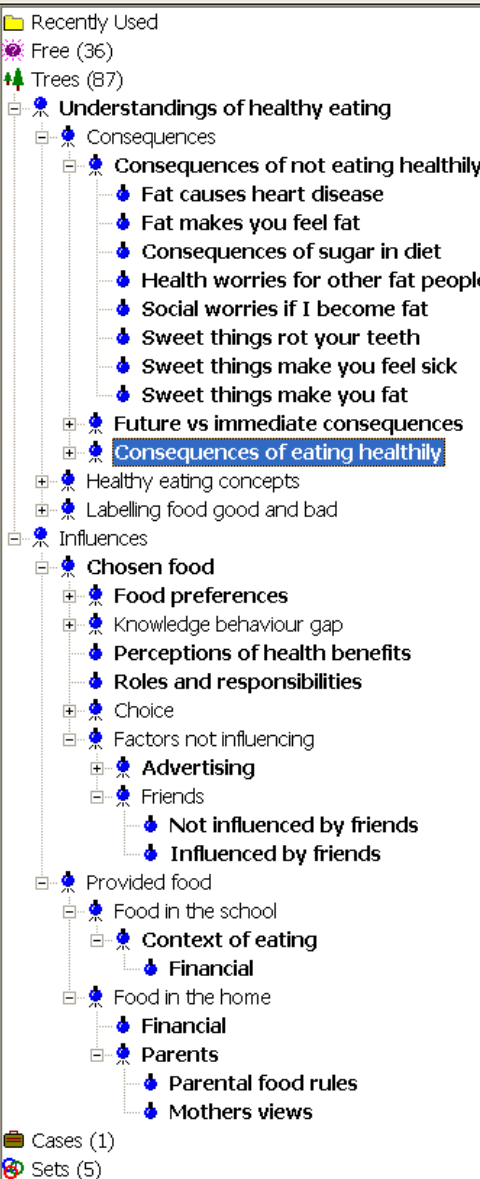
Reports

Code within this code

Properties...

You are logged in as: James Thomas

Review: Children and Healthy Eating: A systematic review of barriers and facilitators



Title	No.	Passages	Created	Modified
Little mention of positive effects	1	0	09/05/...	09/05/...
You keep energy inside	2	2	09/05/...	09/05/...
Provides vitamins	3	2	09/05/...	09/05/...
Keeps blood and bones strong	4	2	09/05/...	09/05/...
To avoid disease and dying	5	1	09/05/...	09/05/...
So you go to the toilet reguarly	6	1	09/05/...	09/05/...
Good for skin hair teeth and eyes	8	1	09/05/...	09/05/...

**Structuring the
descriptive codes into
descriptive themes**

Documents coded: 3 Children: 7

(no description)

**Understandings
of healthy eating**

**Healthy eating concepts
(understanding)**

'Good' and 'bad' foods

Health consequences

**Influences on
foods eaten**

Chosen foods

Food preferences

Health benefits

Knowledge behaviour gap

Roles and responsibilities

Non-influencing factors

Final list of descriptive themes

**Food in the
school**

Limited choices

Eating to socialize

Contradictions

**Provided
foods**

**Food in
the home**

Food rules

Breaking rules

Stage 3: generating analytical themes

The descriptive themes stayed very ‘close’ to the content of the primary studies, but...

Our synthesis of descriptive themes, did not answer our review question directly

Barriers and facilitators framework:

- What do children think stops them from eating healthily?**
- What do children think helps them to eat healthily?**
- What ideas do children have for what could or should be done to promote their healthy eating?**

‘Recommendations for interventions’

Analytical themes emerged through a cyclical process which involved interrogating the descriptive themes to answer these questions

Example: generating analytical themes (1)

Five of the 12 descriptive themes concerned the influences on children's choice of foods

- **(food preferences, perceptions of health benefits, knowledge behaviour gap, roles and responsibilities, non-influencing factors)**

Children identified that:

- **taste was the major concern for them when selecting food;**
- **health was either a secondary factor or, in some cases, a reason for rejecting food;**
- **buying healthy food was not a legitimate use of their pocket money which they would use to buy sweets that could be enjoyed with friends**

Example: generating analytical themes (2)

These perspectives indicated to us that:

- **branding fruit and vegetables as a ‘tasty’ rather than ‘healthy’ might be more effective in increasing consumption**
- **‘All adverts for healthy stuff go on about healthy things. The adverts for unhealthy things tell you how nice they taste.’**

We captured this line of argument in the *analytical theme* entitled ‘Children do not see it as their role to be interested in health’.

Stage 3: Analytical themes

1) Children don't see it as their role to be interested in health.

2) Children do not see future health consequences as personally relevant or credible.

3) Fruit, vegetables and confectionary have very different meanings for children.

4) Children actively seek ways to exercise their own choices with regard to foods.

5) Children value eating as a social occasion.

6) Children recognise contradiction between what is promoted and what is provided.

Children consider taste, not health, to be a key influence on their food choice

Food labelled as healthy may lead children to reject them ('I don't like it so it must be healthy')

Buying healthy foods not seen as a legitimate use of their pocket money

Implications for interventions

- 1) Children don't see it as their role to be interested in health.
- 2) Children do not see future health consequences as personally relevant or credible.
- 3) Fruit, vegetables and confectionary have very different meanings for children.
- 4) Children actively seek ways to exercise their own choices with regard to foods.
- 5) Children value eating as a social occasion.
- 6) Children recognise contradiction between what is promoted and what is provided.

Brand fruit and vegetables as 'tasty' rather than 'healthy'.

Reduce health emphasis of messages



Do not promote fruit and vegetables in the same way within the same intervention.

Create situations for children to have ownership over their food choices.



Ensure messages promoting fruit and vegetables are supported by appropriate access to fruit and vegetables

Thank you!
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