

Factors that influence diet among adolescents living in an informal settlement in Kenya: A qualitative exploration

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BACKGROUND

- Optimal nutrition during adolescence is important for adolescents' short- and long-term health
- In low- and middle-income countries, **adolescents face increased risks for all forms of malnutrition**
- In Kenya, rates of overweight, obesity, and nutrition-related noncommunicable diseases are rising while undernutrition and micronutrient deficiencies persist
- In Nairobi, **70% of the population lives in informal settlements**; Kibera is the largest
- Adolescents in Kibera consume **diets with limited diversity** and often eat prepared calorie-dense foods and snacks from roadside stalls

OBJECTIVES

- Explore factors that influence diet among adolescents in Kibera
- Identify potential school-based diet and intervention components

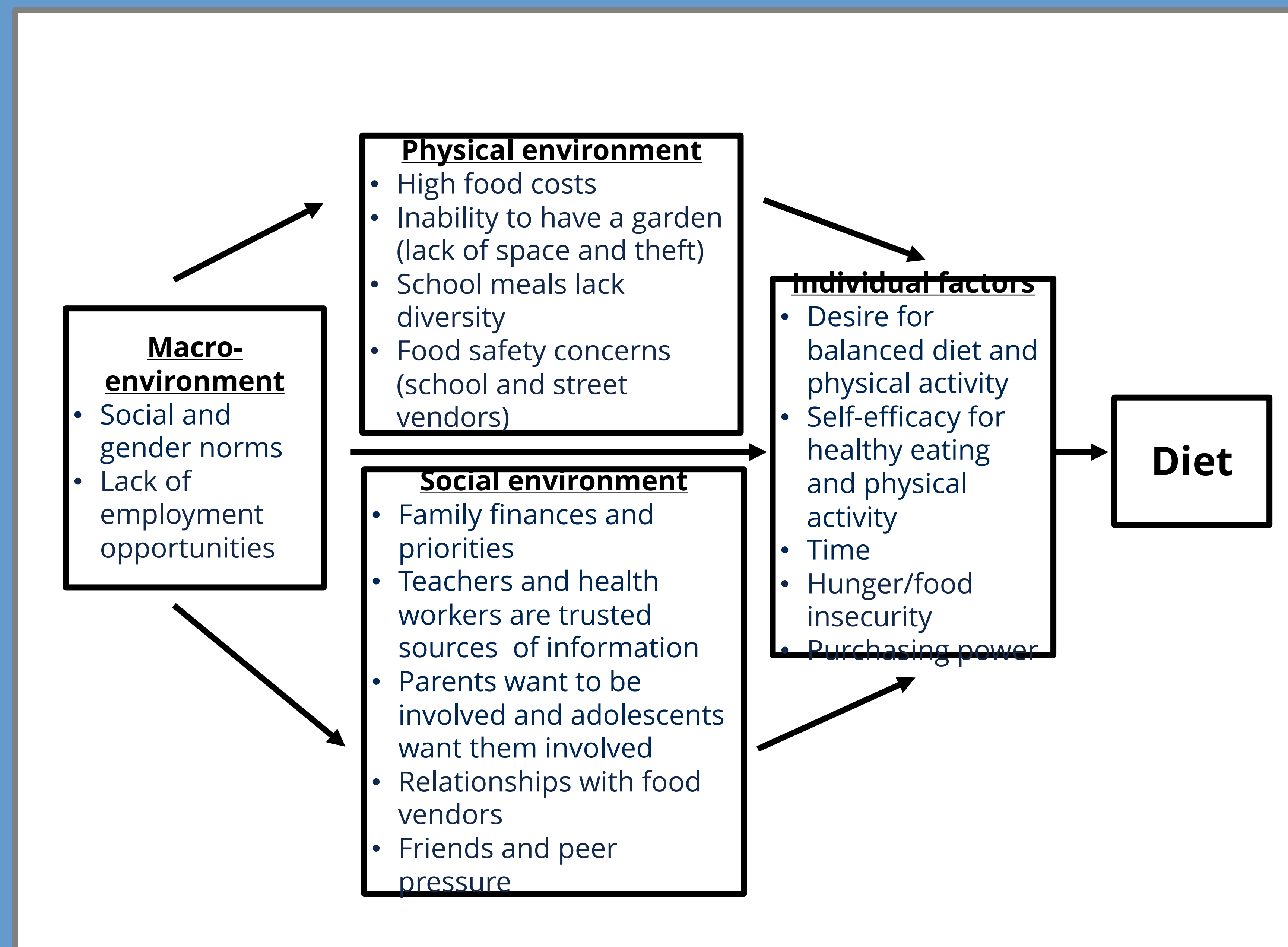
METHODS

- Collected qualitative data through:
 - Focus group discussions
 - 8 with adolescent girls 13-19 years of age
 - 6 with adolescent boys 13-19 years of age
 - 4 with parents and guardians of adolescents
 - 3 with secondary school teachers
 - Key informant interviews
 - 5 school administrators
 - 7 health care workers
- Transcribed and translated focus group and interview recordings
- Team of CFK Africa and UNC researchers analyzed transcripts thematically using Atlas.ti

RESULTS

- Individual and environmental factors influence adolescents' diets (Fig 2)
- Adolescents and their parents described food insecurity and high costs of healthy foods as key barriers to healthy diets
- They worried about the hygiene and safety of school meals and food from street vendors
- Adolescents enjoyed learning about balanced diets in school and wanted their parents to receive the same information
- Adolescents want to learn more about healthy foods, preparing healthy meals on a budget, and gardening

Figure 2: Factors that Influence Adolescent Diets



CONCLUSIONS AND POTENTIAL INTERVENTION

- Despite wanting to eat a balanced diet, adolescents in Kibera experience considerable environmental and individual barriers
- Contextually appropriate multicomponent interventions are needed to address these barriers
- Potential intervention components that participants suggested include:
 - More school-based activities to promote nutrition
 - Incorporated into the curriculum
 - Additional extracurricular activities
 - Improve school meals by serving more fruits and vegetables and increasing the variety of foods provided
 - Engage parents, guardians, and other family members in school-based activities that promote nutrition
 - Gardens at schools
 - Cooking classes with nutrition education
- Next steps: refine potential intervention components with Community Advisory Board members

Table 1. Select themes and related quotes

THEME	ILLUSTRATIVE QUOTES
Social and gender norms influence diet	<i>"Boys can play sports after school from 5pm to 7pm but as a girl you cannot leave the school at 7pm. Girls can play 5:10pm to 6pm. The boys stay until 7pm because they can protect themselves...Your parents won't allow you to leave school at 7pm when there are dirty plates waiting for you at home, you are supposed to cook and do your homework."</i> -Adolescent girl
Limited finances and high food costs limit diet quality	<i>"We tend to just eat what we come by. We do not have a plan that this time we will eat this and when that time reaches, we will eat that. If I am blessed to get vegetables or kale, I will cook them, but maybe I do not have onions or tomatoes, so we eat them plain with ugali and drink lots of water. Here in this place of ours there is no healthy eating, we eat what comes our way."</i> -Parent of an adolescent
Concerns about food safety	<i>"There is a lady who prepares chapati, she is located next to the sewer and flies come from the sewer and land on the food. There is no form of cleanliness at all."</i> -Adolescent boy
Drugs and alcohol are barriers to a healthy diet	<i>"Most of our children are lost in drugs. During the weekend they dress up and start taking drugs. You will only see them at 12 am having taken only breakfast. They skip lunch."</i> -Parent of an adolescent
Peer pressure influences diet	<i>"For example, the way we are here as a group, one person can just suggest that we eat this and then it is supported by the majority, so you are forced to buy it."</i> -Adolescent girl



Figure 1. CFK Africa Youth Health & Wellness Center mural

Photo: Emily Seiger



Figure 3. CFK Africa Youth Health & Wellness Center mural

Photo: Emily Seiger