

# MAPHM Symposium 2017

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Abstract Title:

## **Body Mass Index and Sugar Consumption in Maltese School Children**

First author:

**Dr Paula Vassallo**

Other Authors:

Ethel Vento Zahra

### Abstract

#### Background

Childhood obesity is one of the main public health problems that Europe is facing, with Malta having one of the highest prevalence of overweight and obese school children. Current evidence shows that the causes for obesity are multifactorial. The health behaviour in school children study shows that Maltese school children are amongst the highest consumers of sugar sweetened beverages in Europe.

Assessing the dietary habits in terms of sugar consumption both in terms of frequency and type, in relation to their Body Mass Index, will further support the current legislation in place and address the need for further upstream strategies targeting sugar consumption.

#### Methods

The study involved screening of 3,5,8,12 and 15 year old school children who were randomly selected using a stratified sampling method. All types of schools were involved in the study and all children with a positive consent form were included in the study. 12 and 15 year old participants were given a self administered questionnaire, while 3,5 and 8 year old participants were given a questionnaire to be completed by their parent/guardian. This questionnaire included a comprehensive list of sugary foods and drinks including also hidden sugars, which also included the frequency of consumption of these foods. The children were screened using standardised conditions by trained examiners.

#### Results

The results are currently being analysed, and will be available by August 2017. The results will indicate where the limited resources need to be allocated with respect to obesity.

#### Conclusions

The results will help to provide further evidence locally on the need for a more directed approach and will further substantiate the need for more upstream action to reduce sugar consumption among school children. As obesity is now being referred to as a disease, this will also help in more targeted downstream preventive advice. Addressing childhood obesity will reduce the expenditure on treatment of non-communicable diseases, allowing for more sustainability of the health care



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system and long term better quality of life for the individual, allowing today's children to enter old age in a healthier state.

Messages:

Childhood obesity

Sugar consumption