School meal programs and their potential to operate as school-based obesity prevention and nutrition interventions: case studies from France and Japan

Previous school-based intervention studies to address the challenge of overweight and obesity have indicated that while some results are positive, the effects remain modest. Unfortunately, these programmes often fail to address key social determinants. Through case studies, this article examines the role of school meal programmes as sustainable interventions that can promote healthy eating and address household food insecurity. Through a case study approach, this study uses experiences from France and Japan to identify the successes and challenges of school meal programmes.

Both countries have similar school-meals systems and are both at risk of promoting social exclusion, especially regarding accommodating dietary restrictions. However, both countries have addressed childhood obesity through national legislation that focuses on child nutrition and physical activity and have drawn special attention to improving school lunch programmes. A key finding highlighted by parents through this study is the importance of school meals as an essential way to educate children about healthy eating and promote food literacy.