

The Social Community Experiences of Preadolescent Children with Food Allergies/Dietary Restrictions

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Background

- Social participation allows for the development of autonomy, friendships, and social skills¹
- Food allergies can prevent full participation in society²
- Most literature is focused on young children and adolescents

Research aim: What are the social community mealtime experiences of preadolescent children with food allergies/dietary restrictions?

Methods

- Design: Qualitative study with phenomenological approach
- Participants: Children between the ages of 11 and 14 who have a food allergy or dietary restriction
- Data collection: one-on-one, semi-structured interviews
- Data analysis: thematic coding

Results

Parent Involvement

"Sometimes my mom cooks a meal [for youth group] and that's when it's easiest because everything is just free of allergens."

Ease of Participation

"...maybe it was hard at first, I can't quite remember. But now, it's pretty easy....it's normal now."

Negative Emotions

"...it's kind of upsetting when you're really looking forward to your meal, but then you figure out it has something in it that you can't have..."

Discussion

- Community participation itself is not negatively impacted or restricted for preadolescent children with food allergies/dietary restrictions
- Parents assumed a significant role in managing their children's food allergies/dietary restrictions in the community through planning, communicating, and advocating
- Availability of food options and acceptance of the food allergy/dietary restriction contributed to ease of social participation in the community
- The negative emotions experienced by preadolescent children decreased the quality of their mealtime experiences in the community

Implications

- Findings provide a more holistic, transactional understanding of the experiences of community mealtime occupations for this population
- OTs can help children manage their food allergies/dietary restrictions while also fully engaging in social occupations

References

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