

# Drivers of Adolescents' Fruits and Vegetables Choice Behavior in Sri Lanka



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## Adolescents and Fruits & Vegetables

- **Fruits and Vegetables (F&V) – rich in nutrients and an essential part of a balanced diet**
  - F&V intake is below the recommended levels in Sri Lanka (Jayawardena *et al.*, 2012)
  - Achieving sustainable healthy diets requires understanding how people make food choices - what, how, and why people eat the way they do (Blake *et al.*, 2021)
  - The extent and nature of the low consumption - insufficient data on contextual factors that shape eating habits
- **Adolescence – a critical phase of remarkable physiological development**
  - Considerable prevalence of undernutrition, overweight and obesity, and micronutrient deficiencies among adolescents Sri Lanka (Jayatissa *et al.*, 2023)
  - A period increasingly assert their independence and autonomy in food choices, shaped by the interaction among several factors (Neufeld *et al.*, 2022)

## Food choice behavior

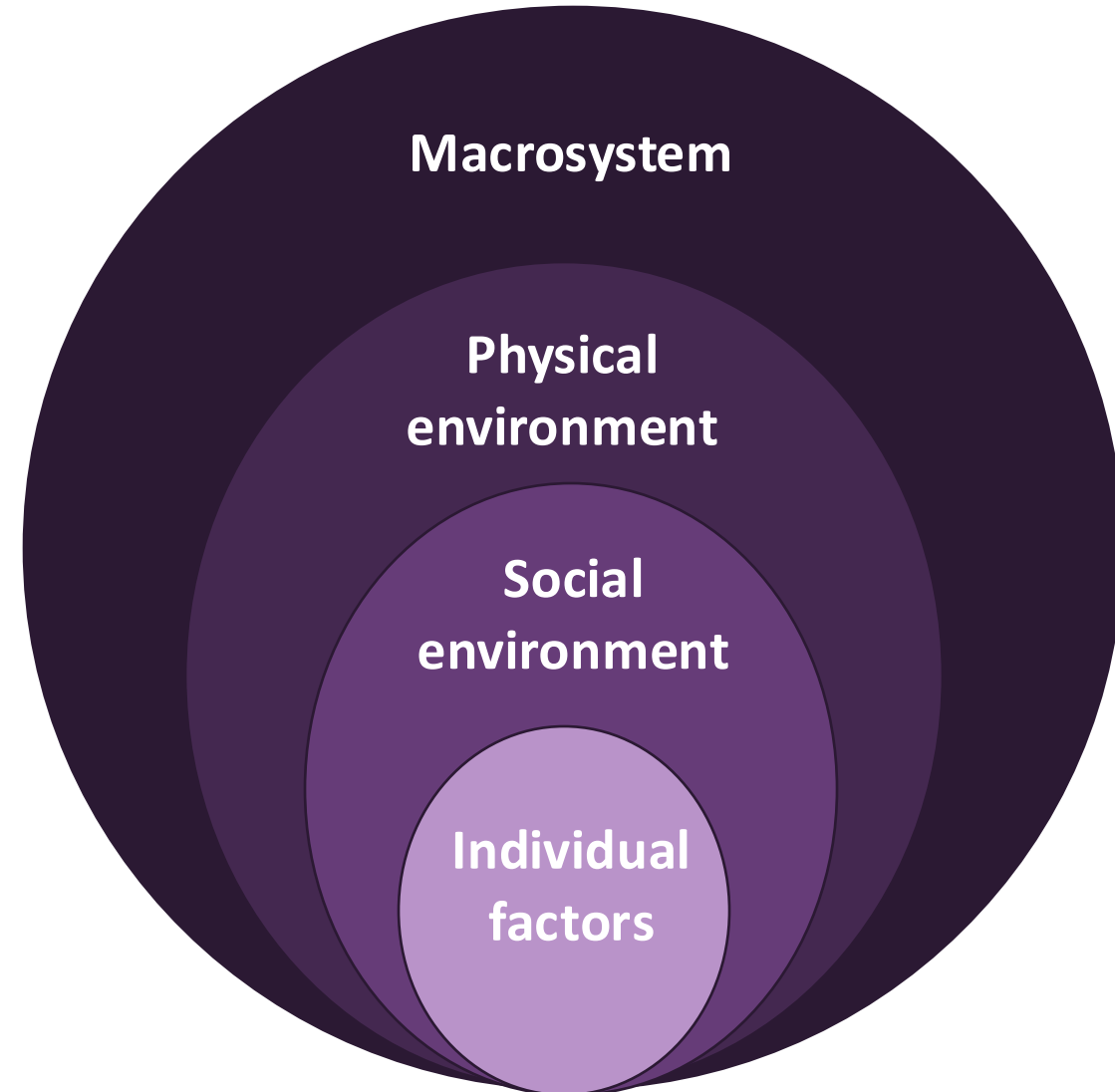
“How and why do people eat what they do?”

1) What do people eat from the options available and accessible in the sociocultural and physical environments?

2) How do people interact with social and physical environments to acquire, prepare, distribute, and consume food?

3) Why do people decide to acquire, prepare, distribute, and consume foods as they do?

Blake *et al.*, 2021



Story *et al.*, 2002

## Objective and Methodology

- To identify the individual, social, physical, and macrosystem factors affecting F&V acquisition, preparation, and consumption behavior among adolescents in Sri Lanka

### Qualitative study



18 Focus Group Discussions



Urban - 6



Rural - 12

Gender  
Ethnicity



14-16 year adolescents



# Findings – F&V Acquisition

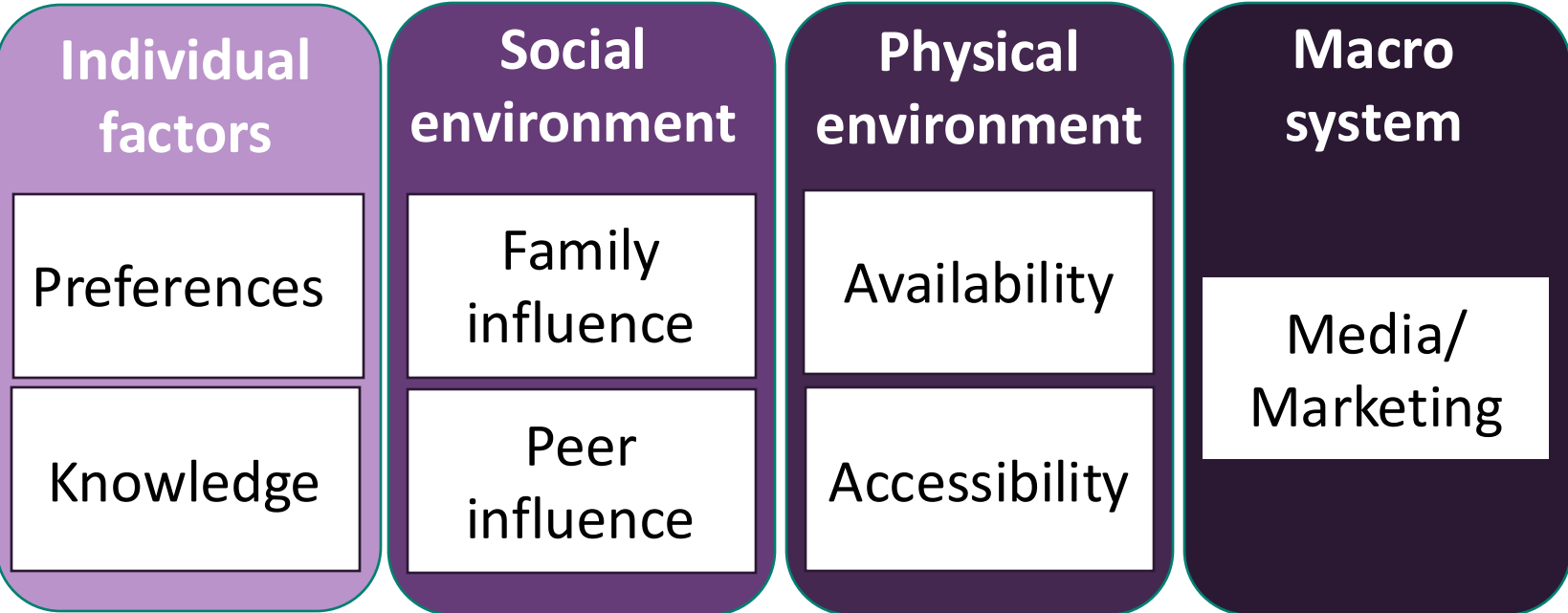


“My mother often avoids buying F&V from the market, believing they may contain harmful chemicals, so we usually eat what we grow in our garden.”

“When purchasing, we ensure that the F&V matches their expected color and exhibits signs of freshness and healthy growth.”

“My mother forbid eating certain F&V, explaining that some are considered ‘cold’ or ‘hot’ and may lead to health issues”

“Even though I like to eat fruits, I don’t request my mom to buy fruits because those are expensive”





## Findings – F&V Preparation

“If F&V are prepared in a way which I like, such as brinjal tempered with chili powder and oil, I enjoy eating them because I like that color produced after cooking in that way”

“I always help mom to prepare different dishes using F&V. I always prefer to eat fruits as same-sized pieces, because that's the way I used to eat”

“I think cleanliness is the priority in handling F&V. We always wash the vegetables with salt water to remove any chemicals available”

### Individual factors

Preferences

Knowledge

### Social environment

Family influence

Peer influence

### Physical environment

Availability

Opportunities

### Macro system

Media/  
Marketing



## Findings – F&V Consumption

“Eating F&V contributes to maintaining good health by providing nutrients and vitamins that support overall well-being”

“My mother makes porridge at least once a week, using curry leaves and other green leafy vegetables available in the garden. Therefore I drink porridge even I don't like to eat green leafy vegetables”

“We would eat more if the F&V were grown in the home garden because they are fresh”

### Individual factors

Preferences

Perceived barriers

### Social environment

Family influence

Peer influence

### Physical environment

Availability

### Macro system

Media/  
Marketing





## Suggestions

1. Culinary diversity
2. Access to fresh F&V
3. Cost optimization strategies
4. Seasonal management of F&V
5. Low chemical application
6. Home gardening

## Conclusion

**Personal preferences, family influence, availability, marketing, and media influence** are the most influential individual, social, physical, and macrosystem factors on adolescents' F&V choice behavior



## Implication

**Planning targeted interventions to promote F&V consumption among adolescents in Sri Lanka**



*Thank You!*

