

Revealing links between education and a good diet

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Educational status appears to have positive influence on a healthy diet, particularly in low income countries, according to new research examining European nutritional data.

Using national data on 27,334 individuals from 12 European countries, researchers at the University of Leeds, in collaboration with the World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe (WHO Europe), examined the interactions between [socioeconomic status](#), education and diet.

Their study, published in *PLOS ONE*, shows for the first time that higher educational status appeared to have a mitigating effect on poorer diet in lower income European countries. As individual education level increased so did nutritional intake encouraged as part of a [healthy diet](#), particularly iron and total folate.

The findings highlight the need for strong policies supporting good nutrition, prioritising lower education groups.

Poor diet and malnutrition linked to noncommunicable diseases, such as obesity, hypertension and [cardiovascular disease](#), presents major health problems across Europe. In 2018, 59% of adults in the WHO European Region were overweight or obese and [noncommunicable diseases](#) are the leading cause of death, disease and disability in the region.

The World Health Organization encourages countries to conduct national diet surveys to gather data to inform public health policies to prevent such diseases.

This work is the first to combine national diet survey data from WHO European Member States spanning all regions of Europe. It provides the largest representative diet survey dataset across WHO Europe, providing an important source of evidence on which to base policy.

Lead author Dr. Holly Rippin began this research while a postgraduate researcher in the School of Food Science and Nutrition at Leeds, she is now a WHO consultant. She said: "Our study shows that national income

and diet quality appear to be linked, and education could protect against some of the long-term negative effects of poor nutrition on population health.

"Strategies supporting education in lower education groups and [lower income](#) countries could be effective in improving nutrition, particularly in disadvantaged groups."

Co-author Janet Cade, professor of nutritional epidemiology and public health at Leeds, said: "This was a great collaborative effort between 12 European countries—we hope that policymakers across Europe will use this information to inform their nutrition policies in the future and prioritize these vulnerable groups."

More information: Inequalities in education and income are associated with poorer diet: pooled analysis of individual participant data across 12 European countries, *PLOS ONE* (2020). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0232447](#)

Provided by University of Leeds

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