

An Internet-Based Program to Promote Healthy Eating Behavior among Thai Early Adolescents

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ABSTRACT

This participatory action research (PAR) aimed to develop an Internet-based program for promoting healthy eating behavior among Thai early adolescents based on a participatory approach. The study participants were 73 adolescent members and 27 adolescent leaders, aged 12-13 years, attending a private school in the urban area, Chiang Mai, Thailand. Key stakeholders were also involved, including: fifteen teachers, one school nurse and seven parents. The study used various methods to collect both qualitative and quantitative data. The findings of this study are presented in respect of unhealthy eating behavior issues among Thai early adolescents, critical elements of the Internet-based program and the outcomes of implementing the Internet-based program.

Key words: Early adolescents, Healthy eating behavior, An Internet-based program, Participatory action research, Thailand

INTRODUCTION

Thailand is similar to many other countries where unhealthy eating behavior is an important problem that affects the nutritional status during adolescence, including overweight and obesity, undernutrition and micronutrient deficiencies and eating disorder. Several studies have shown that adolescents in Bangkok and other urbanized provinces not only consume poor energy foods and skip meals, but also consume high amounts of fast and energy-dense foods, saturated fat and dietary supplement products (Limpijarnkit, 1995; Anukoolwuthipong, 1997; Boonpraderm, 1997; Pawaputanond Na Mahasarakam, 2001; Phuphaibul et al., 2003). Ensuring good nutrition is challenging for adolescents because this developmental stage is the peak time for body image dissatisfaction, with many teens expressing a desire to have a body weight less than their present weight, and therefore liable to misuse drugs and food products for weight loss (Gunta, 2002; Tanausawanont, 2006). Food habits, lifestyles and social behavior established during adolescents are highly predictable to contribute to poor nutrition and increased diseases in adulthood.