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## Parents' perceptions regarding time allocated to eat school lunches in primary schools

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Parents and teachers have expressed concerns about the adequacy of time allocated to eat lunch at primary schools in Australia<sup>(1)</sup>. Short school lunch durations can result in negative outcomes such as insufficient food consumption, resulting in hunger and inadequate energy and nutrition<sup>(2)</sup>. A recent study reported that students consumed less fruits and vegetables when given 10 minutes to eat compared to 20 minutes<sup>(3)</sup>, leading to increased food waste. We aimed to explore parents' perceptions regarding time-related aspects associated with school lunch including the sufficiency of time to eat school lunch, children requesting and parents providing quick-to-eat food, and the perception that healthy food takes longer time to eat. Additionally, we aimed to explore whether these time-related perceptions and children's age are associated with how often children finish their lunches. An online survey was conducted in 2022 to explore Victorian parents' perceptions regarding primary school lunches including the aspects mentioned above. Frequencies and percentages were calculated for all variables. Chi-square tests were used to explore the relationship between parents' perceptions of time-related aspects and child's age and how often children finish their lunches. Out of 359 parents, 29% reported that their child sometimes, rarely, or never finishes their lunches. When asked about reasons for this, 20% chose 'not enough time is provided to finish lunch' and 19% chose 'my child is more interested in playing than eating during lunchtime'. About half of parents strongly agreed or agreed (SA/A) that the allocated time at their child's school is not sufficient to eat school lunch (48%). Fifty percent of parents SA/A that their child asks them to pack easy-to-eat food and 60% SA/A that they provide such food for school lunches. However, the majority of parents (62%) strongly disagreed or disagreed (SD/D) that healthy foods take longer than less healthy food to eat during school lunchtime. More parents who SA/A with the statement 'the allocated time at my child's school is not sufficient to eat school lunch' reported their child finishes lunch sometimes, rarely or never compared to parents who SD/D with this statement (36% vs 16%, Chi-sq = 11.372, p = 0.003). Parents' perceptions regarding other time-related aspects were not associated with finishing lunches. More parents of children in prep to grade 2 compared to parents of children in grades 3 to 6 reported their child finishes their lunch sometimes, rarely or never (73% vs 49%, Chi-sq = 16.813, p < 0.001). The findings indicate that parents have concerns about the time allocated to eat lunch at primary schools. Increasing the time allocated to eating school lunches would help to ease these concerns and allow children, especially the younger primary school children, to eat comfortably and finish their lunches if they wish to do so.

### References

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