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Communities that cook: a systematic review of the effectiveness and appropriateness of interventions to introduce adults to home cooking

This review explores cooking courses in the UK in the context of promoting 'home-cooking' community based courses for adults.

Key words: home-cooking; community based; health; diet; social-connectedness

The review was carried out by the **Institute of Education's Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Co-ordinating Centre (EPPI-Centre)** in 2012. It was commissioned and funded by the Department of Health.

Key findings

Findings are of interest to policy makers, teachers, health professionals, people working in community development, researchers, research funding bodies.



- The review identified 13 course evaluations conducted in the UK. The home cooking courses for adults that have been evaluated appear broadly similar to one another with most emphasising practical skill-training for healthy eating, food hygiene, budgeting or shopping. Courses have usually been offered to existing community groups, rather than marketed direct to individuals, and run in shared community settings, which range from all-purpose centres to purpose-built community kitchens.
- The courses vary in three main ways: 1) whether or not the content of the training sessions is tailored to the needs of people with specific illnesses, ethnic backgrounds or life stages; 2) whether or not the initiative recruits people from the community who then teach others; and 3) whether courses are initiated by research teams in order that they be evaluated, or whether the courses exist prior to evaluation.
- One well-conducted evaluation of peer-led cooking clubs for people aged 65 or older in sheltered housing in socially deprived areas suggests that cooking courses in this population might have beneficial impacts. Participants in the clubs also enjoyed the social aspects of their cooking sessions and appreciated learning from people of a similar age and authority.

In addition to the 13 evaluation studies in our review, we came across a far larger number of reports and websites that described home cooking courses that had been, or were still being delivered in the UK. Study reports however, often contained little information about the courses themselves and key details about evaluation methods were often missing. Authors described difficulties with recruiting participants and allocating them to study groups, as well as difficulties with participants dropping out before the study was completed.

What we did

Concerns over the health implications of poor diets, and claims for links between cooking and social connectedness, have led to heightened interest in the UK public's ability to cook. There has been a focus recently on community-based, 'home cooking' courses aimed at adults. This review aimed to explore the range of these courses evaluated in the UK and to synthesise findings about outcomes and appropriateness.

How we did it

The review addressed the following questions:

- What constitutes a home cooking initiative for adults and how might these vary?

- What kinds of home cooking initiative for adults have been evaluated in the UK?
- What are the effects of these home cooking initiatives on outcomes for participants?
- How do these effects differ for different types of participant, especially in terms of socio-economic and other kinds of disadvantage?
- What is known about the appropriateness and cost-effectiveness of these initiatives?

Extensive searches identified 13 reports that reported evaluation methods. Five evaluations that had used a comparison group design to evaluate impact were described and appraised by two independent reviewers. The study methods and course details from all 13 evaluations were described.

Implications

The current evidence on the effects of home cooking courses for adults in the UK is inconclusive because of a lack of high-quality evaluations of these schemes.

There is interest in developing and providing such courses among a range of different organisations and agencies across the UK, offering the potential for further research in this area.

Further information

For the full report see ['Communities that cook: a systematic review of the effectiveness and appropriateness of interventions to introduce adults to home cooking'](#)

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