

What's for lunch: content and preferences of primary school children

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Background

There is an increasing number of Dutch primary school children who are transitioning from eating lunch at home to eating lunch at school.

Objective

Investigating the content of lunchboxes of Dutch primary school children during schooldays. Besides, to provide insight in children's preferences for healthy school lunch concepts and understand potential differences between gender, group and migration background.

Methods

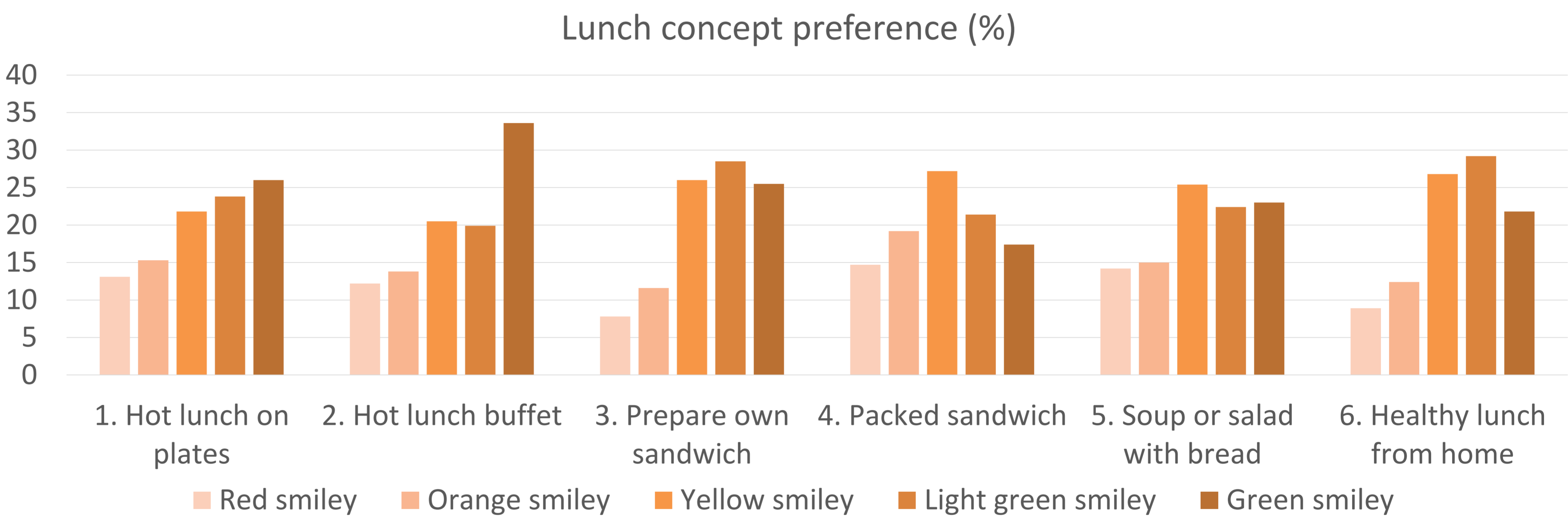
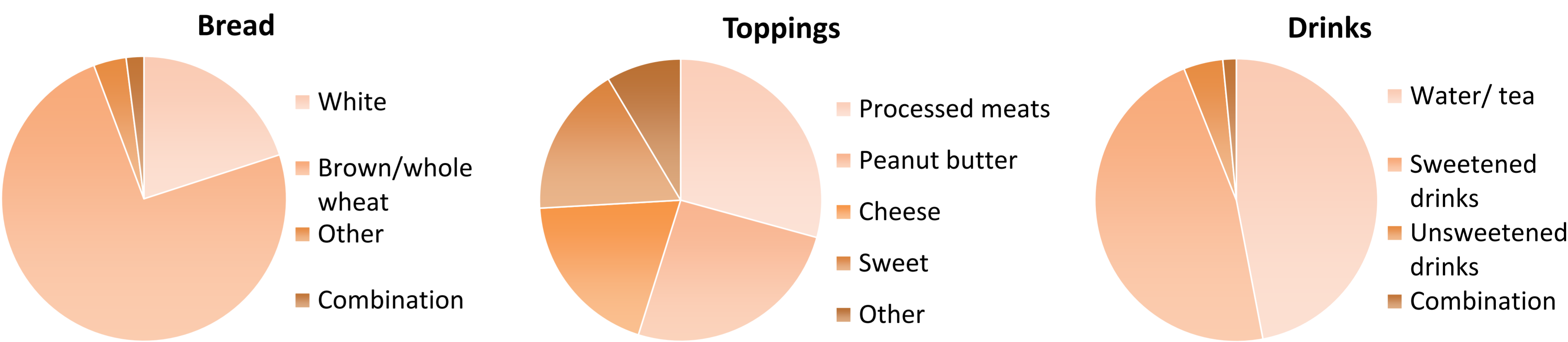
- Cross-sectional study among Dutch primary school children aged 4-12 years of seven schools in Amsterdam and Ede.
- Demographic characteristics and lunch preferences were obtained through a questionnaire.
- Content of lunch was assessed with photographs.

Table 1 Characteristics

	N	%
Total	639	
Boys	296	46.3
Class		
5-6	252	39.4
7-8	387	58.5
Migration background		
Western	442	69.2
Non-western	182	28.5

Results

- The most consumed products at lunch were bread (consumed by 94.7% of the children), water/tea (42.9%), sweetened drinks (42.9%).
- Fruit (5.1%) and vegetable consumption (6.0%) during lunch was very low.
- School lunch concepts elicited mixed opinions among children.
- Compared to boys, girls reported a higher preference for a hot meal on plates (p=0.009), prepare your own sandwich (p=0.008) and soup or salad with bread (p=0.007).
- Overall children with a western migration background showed higher preference scores for lunch concepts than children with a non-western migration background.



Conclusions

The current content of the lunches consumed by Dutch primary school children leaves room for improvement, especially regarding fruits and vegetables. Preferences of children for the healthy school lunch concepts are mainly positive, however there are differences between gender and migration background.

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