

# Factors that Influence Food Decisions and Choices of Year 10 Students

Heimata Herman<sup>1</sup>, Celeste Barrett-Watson<sup>2</sup>, Karen Tairea<sup>3</sup>, Ina Herrmann<sup>4</sup>, Mark Vickers<sup>1</sup> and Jacquie Bay<sup>1</sup>

1. Liggins Institute, University of Auckland, New Zealand; 2. Tereora College, National College of the Cook Islands, Rarotonga, Cook Islands; 3. Te Marae Ora, Cook Islands Ministry of Health, Cook Islands; 4. Maraurau o te Pae Api'i, Cook Islands Ministry of Education, Cook Islands

## Introduction

- The Cook Islands has worryingly high rates of noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), such as cardiovascular diseases, cancers, and diabetes.
- NCD risk factors such as obesity and high blood pressure are increasingly present in the adolescent population.
- This tells us that risk factors are developing earlier in life, highlighting an urgent need for prevention strategies.
- There are currently no published research studies exploring the perspectives of Cook Islands adolescents and their parents/caregivers regarding food behaviours.
- Understanding the perspectives of adolescents and their families regarding food behaviours is important in informing NCD risk reduction interventions.

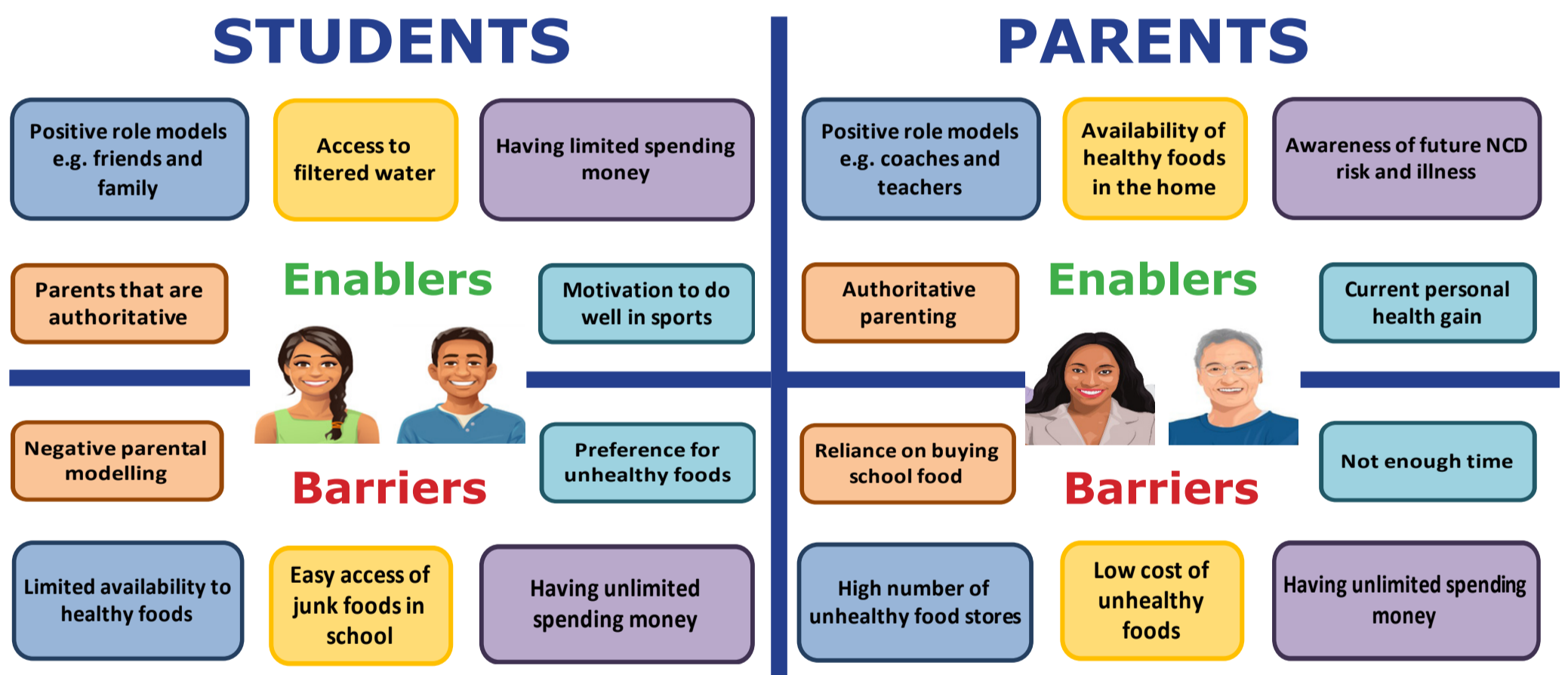
## Aim

To examine the perspectives of adolescents and their parents/caregivers about factors influencing food behaviours.

## Method

- Thirteen Year 10 students who had participated in the Pacific Science for Health Literacy Project in Year 9 in 2016 agreed to take part in this study with their parents/caregivers.
- The students completed food behaviour surveys before and after the learning programmes.
- They completed a three-day food & activity diary and were interviewed to capture their ideas about food behaviours.
- Parents and/or caregivers were interviewed separately.
- Interviews were audio recorded and analysed to search for common ideas.

## Results



## Discussion

- For students, the most commonly reported factors that support healthy food choices were having limited spending money from parents/caregivers and access to filtered water on tap in school.
- For students, the most commonly reported barriers to making healthy food choices were a preference for unhealthy foods and easy access of junk foods in schools.
- For parents, an awareness of future NCD risk and illness were motivation to making healthy food decisions for them and their family. Being authoritative or strict parents was a common factor that supports their child to eat healthy.
- For parents, the reliance on buying school food from shops instead of home made meals was a reported barrier to healthy food choices. Also, the high number of unhealthy food stores was another commonly reported barrier.

## Conclusion

- Findings show that a number of personal, social and economic influences impact food behaviours of Rarotongan adolescents. There are similarities and differences in what students and parents reported as enablers and barriers to healthy food choices.

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