

# **Soul Buddyz parenting research on nutrition**

## ***Background***

Soul Buddyz 3 is in its formative stage of development. Soul Buddyz is a multimedia health promotion vehicle for children aged between 8 and 12 years old. The vehicle consists of a 26 episode television drama, a 26 episode radio magazine programme in nine languages, a grade 7 lifeskills book as well as a booklet for parents in 4 languages. After the second series of Soul Buddyz the Soul City Institute for Health and Development Communication together with SABC education and SABC 1 looked at the television aspect of Soul Buddyz and decided to make the following changes: The television drama will target 8-12 year olds, but will also target parents aged between 24-35 years old.

This research is about the one topic being dealt with in the series, nutrition.

### **Nutrition**

Currently in South Africa there are millions of people living in poverty and many families are struggling to put food on the table. This has led to a lot of children being admitted or dying from malnutrition. In the series we will link nutrition to HIV/AIDS, with a lack of money and poverty we need to encourage people to look at alternative means of providing nutritional meals at minimal cost by starting their own vegetable gardens.

Media is one vehicle that has managed to shape and influence how young people make decisions. It has continued to present thin and skinny women as beautiful and attractive, thus leading to young people being too conscious about their body image. Because they want to fit in and have the “right and cool look” they end up going on fad diets and bingeing. Within this theme we will also highlight the importance of exercise and keeping fit in order to stay healthy

Soul Buddyz 3 will also deal with this issue from the parent’s perspective. This research aims to get that perspective.

### **Objective of research:**

- To find out parent (and teacher) knowledge, attitude and beliefs relating to nutrition, particularly with regard to their children.

## ***Methodology***

Qualitative interviews were conducted with parents and teachers 24-35 years old.

8 groups were conducted where the issues of AIDS and Nutrition were explored (separately). The groups were conducted in Limpopo, North West province, Gauteng, and Eastern Cape. There was one Indian group and three coloured groups.

	Urban	Peri-urban	Rural	Total
Male	1		2	3
Female	2	1	1	4
Mixed		1		1

The groups were transcribed verbatim and then analysed by themes using Atlas ti software.

## **Results**

### **Knowledge**

In general parents have some knowledge about nutrition, they often talked about a balanced diet, and the need for children to eat more or lots of fruit and vegetables.

*Another thing is that we should not force them we should just make sure that is food is balanced,*  
(peri-urban mixed)

*Usually rice and meat and vegetables. Or spaghetti and mince. Or vetkoek and mince. But you see to it that at least they get a cooked meal every day.*(urban coloured female)

*I make sure that she has a balanced diet. Yeah.* (urban females, Indian)

*We give them fruit, yoghurt all these good things.* (peri-urban mixed)

*When I grew up we never used to get any vegetables with our meals during the week. We would eat pap and tripe or samp with beans. Now in my family I make sure there are vegetables daily.* (rural females)

*Less junk food. Less oil. Less sugar. Yeah, less oil. Less salt. Some people like their food salty. Ooh, I don't like a lot of salt. Too much carbohydrates, especially white bread. When you eat too much of these kinds of foods. Pasta is healthy – that's a good carb.*  
(urban coloured female)

## **Practice**

Children's diets are chiefly, however, made up of Pap and bread, with various accompaniments. This usually depends on the amount of money available.

*R: You know here at home we give them pap. You know pap with anything hat they can eat. R: yes, pap and seshabo relish. ( rural females)*

*R: You know bread is expensive. We cannot afford to buy bread all the time. So with me I only give them bread in the morning when they go to school and during the day and in the evening I give them pap with anything. (rural females)*

*Our staple food is nothing else but pap and bread basically that's what we normally eat. One problem is that before we used to rely on vegetables now of late we tend to like meat more than vegetable (laughter) food without meat we regard as no food. (urban male)*

*Yes, bread and pap every day. (rural females)*

*With us diet has different combination, but the most important thing is Pap (Pap is the most important thing... the only difference will be in something to flavour Pap with, it will be meat, vegetables and sometimes eggs. (rural males)*

*Okay, we're still in a position to buy food and eat healthily but there are kids who eat pap every day. Sometimes that's all they have for the day. Yeah, or pap and dried fish or maas or whatever. Or bread the whole day. Even dry bread. (urban coloured female)*

## **Cost**

What people eat is often directly related to the amount of money available.

*Nn .... Often it is just that when we choose, we are controlled by money, In fact we try by all means to avoid costly diet, we prefer affordable things (rural males)*

*I can say cost is really affecting choices that we make. They way I look at it including the situation of our country, we are not paid that much and this leaves us in a situation at which even food that we eat at our homes also been affected by the salaries that we earn. Because most things these days need money and when we compare these things with the money that we earn, we find it very difficult to afford some good things. Good things do come one or two days. (rural males)*

*You cannot always afford to buy all the things you like or need. But you somehow make a plan. (laughter). Yes, and like she said, you can buy the same foods at better prices if you just look around. Er ..... food is expensive. Food is generally expensive. It doesn't really affect our eating. I would work around that, you know. I will buy something that is good. I won't just make anything. But there is a meal on the table everyday. I do shopping once*

*a month. I normally just buy fresh things during the month, like bread and veggies. ( peri-urban mixed)*

*Let's first be clear that the healthy food does not require money as such. Vegetables are healthy and I believe that they are not expensive. The only foodstuff that is expensive is meat, so the question is where to get this meat and how. Obviously you have to buy it, if you have few chickens at home you can slaughter one (laughter). If you a vegetable garden at home, it is less expense. (urban females)*

*It is true, poverty, it makes an impossible forming, even though people of these days know about foods that are good for their bodies, the problem is inability to afford the desired diet and the child ends up eating the diet of same kind, and this leaves the poor child with no protein (rural males)*

*[are you influenced by advertising?] To a certain degree I think I am. When they first started advertising this .... this ..... black foods. This chakalaka... then I tried it and we liked it. And this pink lentils they advertised. I tried that and we also like it. And it's very cheap. And you know, here at the end of the month you can take a ten rand and buy a small packet of mixed veg, like onions and tomatoes and maybe a few potatoes. The food is cheap if you buy it in town. Yeah, some shops advertise month-end specials. So you will have enough veg to make a pot of food. (urban coloured female)*

*You normally buy in bulk for the month. Then you maybe get unexpected friends around and then the meat is finished. Then you just eat what there is for the rest of the month because there is nothing else. If there's meat, there's no meat, we eat whatever there is. Also, sometimes I can't afford to buy fresh veg even though it's very healthy. But when I do have money I buy it. Otherwise I buy frozen veg, that can last longer. (urban coloured female)*

### **Difficulties that parents have in getting children to eat healthily**

Parents talked about how they know what a balanced diet is and that it should contain lots of vegetables and fruit, but some found it very difficult to get their children to eat these foods.

*Well, my daughter also doesn't eat porridge in the morning – maybe later in the day. Then there's a sandwich for lunch. In the afternoon she doesn't eat lunch. And in the evening she will have a normal meal with us. But she won't eat veggies. (urban coloured female)*

*I have fussy children so I try and experiment and prepare food in different forms. If the child does not like cooked carrots I give him grated ones that he likes. For instance I will agree to give him pap with milk and then give him a raw carrot as a snack. So I try to balance the meal for the day. (peri-urban mixed)*

*There are things she doesn't like. Oh, yes. Quite a few things with my little one.*

*Yeah. And sometimes we Indians like to cook curry and rice. Or we feel like having something that's too hot. Then I'll make her something else. I'll make her pasta – whatever she wants. Or maybe she wants to have rice. So I'll make her something that I would like*(urban female Indian)

*We also eat Pap with vegetable but the only problem is my children, they do not like vegetables , they only need meat, bread, fruits. So with us, we also eat old foods like “thongolifha” some flying insects like cockroaches), we are eating them, they make us strong. And even “mbula” (some kind of wild vegetation fruits),yes.*  
(rural males)

*Some children are spoiled , when their parents say they don't have the money they throw tantrums and roll on the floor. [referring to sweets] (peri-urban mixed)*

*Yeah one other influential factor is the adverts on television, so these kids they think they own the world because they just demand. “ Dad we need that kind of food we so on television”. So they keep on pestering you and you will end up buying it once and it will eventually become a habit. And as has been indicated that it depends on the pocket if you are able but you also need to be careful not to start things you cannot be able to maintain. (urban male)*

Other factors affecting eating habits of children was that parents are tired during the week and find it difficult to cook a full meal:

*You know, when you get home from work, you really don't want to stand over a stove for long. (urban female)*

*We eat the same things. As long as it's a balanced meal, with veggies and meat. Both me and the children love those two minute noodles. They're very tasty and quick to make. Yeah. I always try to have lots of yoghurt and fruits in the diet because it is important to eat healthily. I enjoy cooking if I have plenty of time. (urban female)*

The biggest meal was often talked of as the Sunday meal

*Ee... sometimes, on Sundays they prepare their rice and salads, usually this happens on Sundays, they will also buy a living “chicken and braai it” (rural males)*

*Eat rice and chicken!  
But mostly we eat that only on Sundays.  
That's when we make a big meal. (rural females)*

### **Strategies that parents employ to get their children to eat healthily**

Changes in the way of cooking and content of the diet

*Ee let me say there are lots of changes in families and even in my family. People of health and welfare have taken steps to teach families on how to cook and change their diet. Woman of these days are no longer those who would cook meat every day. They are able to change, another day, they cook vegetables, eggs, like that, so I see a great change (rural males)*

*I have fussy children so I try and experiment and prepare food in different forms. If the child does not like cooked carrots I give him grated ones that he likes. For instance I will agree to give him pap with milk and then give him a raw carrot as a snack. So I try to balance the meal for the day. (peri-urban mixed)*

Insisting that the children eat fruit and vegetables every day

*When I grew up my mother insisted on healthy meals, fruit and vegetables daily and I am following her example with my children- vegetables daily. I believe that when they grow up they will do the same in their families. I insist on that too because when I grew up and my mother came back from work and found no vegetables for dinner, she got angry. (rural females)*

Ensuring the vegetables are available

*When I grew up we never used to get any vegetables with our meals during the week. We would eat pap and tripe or samp with beans. Now in my family I make sure there are vegetables daily. (peri-urban mixed)*

Training children to eat correctly

*Training children to eat healthily and ensuring only healthy food is available  
What I know is if from the beginning you tell your children that you can buy them junk food if I wish but don't keep such food in the house. When I buy groceries I make sure that I don't include anything that will make them not eat the good food. When I buy food I don't stock on large packets of Simba chips, lots of biscuits and sweets. I buy them sweets as a treat but I don't include them in my grocery budget. So if you raise your children to know that you don't buy these things. When they visit their friends' houses they are surprised that there are such things. So you have to tell them that you will buy them as a treat but you are not going to fill up the grocery cabinet with such things. They do understand. If you train them that this is healthy food, when they grow up they won't go out of their way to eat wrong food. (peri-urban mixed)*

Enforcing correct eating

*You need to enforce a balanced diet for a child. A child can't be too fat, or be too thin. The child has to be the right weight for the child's age. So you obviously can't feed a child sweets for breakfast, lunch and supper. Or even chocolates for breakfast, lunch and*

*supper. If the child wants it you can't just go and buy it, especially when it comes to sweets and chocolates. (rural females)*

Explaining why they should eat various things:

*Sometimes you have to tell them how that food will help their body. For instance I told my child that carrots are good for his sight and he said but your eyes are red and yet you eat carrots. (rural females)*

Plant a vegetable garden

*Eh... with me I have a different experience all altogether. Let's first clear that the healthy food does not require money as such. Vegetables are healthy and I believe that they are not expensive. The only foodstuff that is expensive is meat, so the question is where to get this meat and how. Obviously you have to buy it, if you have few chickens at home you can slaughter one (laughter). If you a vegetable garden at home, its less expense. (urban male)*

## **Malnutrition**

Most people attributed malnutrition to poverty.

*If you can find the baby being so skinny, the other one with a very big head or a balloon stomach, the doctor will tell you that this is due to malnutrition. You will find that the child is fed with soft porridge every single day and even the mother, you will find that she is also failing to get good diet and the poor child eats this soft porridge and fed by the breasts of the starved mother. (rural males)*

Others thought that ignorance played a role too.

*Bad eating habits. Some keep a lot of food in the cupboard but none it is nourishing. Also poverty.(rural female)*

*It's also sometimes eating habits where there is nothing to eat - a lack of food. Or eating only when food is available. Also, I think eating the same types of food. There is a child here – the parents just buy a bag of mealie meal for the whole month. If there is money they buy a dozen of eggs as well. They eat porridge in the morning, after school and in the evenings. Imagine how unhealthy that must be. There's no nourishment there. Or they just add this chicken skins to the mealie meal. I mean, that's not nutrition. (urban coloured female)*

*Yes, like those kids with the ball-cheeks and tummies.*

*And maybe just not enough food. Tonight maybe, you went to bed without food and just had a drink of water. And tomorrow there's still nothing, and you just have to go to bed like that again. (rural females)*

One participant felt that depression could play a role in malnutrition:

*Other people when they are depressed don't eat much and they lose weight and end up being malnourished. (rural females)*

Some participants felt that malnutrition is caused by parental neglect:

*Maybe parents do that. They drink all the money out and don't buy food. You know, those people who just drink all the time and don't eat. They neglect their children. They keep the kids on the breast until they're big and they don't get any other food in between. (rural males)*

## **Obesity**

There were many causes of obesity discussed.

These ranged from lack of exercise, and some parental responsibility for this:

*People who get no exercise. (rural females)*

*The other thing is that these times are different from old times, we used to travel long distances but with our children even if you are sending her or him to place as near as "Muledane", you will have to pop out money for a taxi. Instead of walking and exercise their bodies, our children also try some sports but immediately they start working they suddenly stop participating in sports and end up being people of cars with no any exercise. (rural males)*

*I think is the issue of eating with no any regulation, you find a person eating too much and these foods have fats and you will find that this person is not even exercising, ee .... The body becomes obese (rural males)*

*.... I think people do not do the so-called moderate physical fitness, because they must do some little physical exercise. The community is also relaxed in this issue and think it should be referred to schools. Even food that are full of fats in our bodies can cause obesity, you eat and after eating you just sit and relax, you do not even do nothing, so there is no other way, you should get fat. (rural males)*

*It's always the parent's fault. Yes, they encourage it. And children are inactive. It slows down the metabolism. They don't play games – nothing. And then just sitting and being couch potatoes. They just watch TV. And unhealthy lifestyles. You know, you don't really see children playing anymore – kicking balls and whatever like they used to. They grow up so fast. They don't play netball – nothing. They want to sit and watch TV – crouched over at the TV. (urban coloured female)*



*Obesity occurs when a child does not get healthy food. They can eat what they want, when they want it. There are no clear guidelines as to when to have breakfast, lunch or supper. They constantly snack in-between meals. I think that's how they put on weight. Obesity, for me, is obviously being overweight. I would say, probably eating wrong. Not eating the correct foods. Maybe eating too much of sugar and that, you know. And I would say also probably stress – it could be caused by stress. Obesity.... I'm talking about kids now. You need to enforce a balanced diet for a child. A child can't be too fat, or be too thin. The child has to be the right weight for the child's age. So you obviously can't feed a child sweets for breakfast, lunch and supper. Or even chocolates for breakfast, lunch and supper. If the child wants it you can't just go and buy it, especially when it comes to sweets and chocolates. (peri-urban mixed)*

To discussions about new kinds of food that we eat these days (processed and junk food);

*Junk food also causes obesity- it's eating an unbalanced diet (rural females)*

Although there were some parents who expressed that the change is positive (despite it being associated with obesity)

*With me, generally I can say is the foods that we take these days, it is also determined by the way we eat. Our children are getting good foods because we as their parents are working and some of these parents are experiencing good working conditions. (rural male)*

Heredity is also seen as a cause of obesity as is use of contraceptives, depression and alcohol.

*There is also a hereditary influence wherein you will find the whole family looking like that. (rural males)*

*Well, maybe it's in their family. They can't help it then. ( rural females)*

As well as just eating too much

*Too much sugar. I think also irregular eating patterns. And overeating. (urban coloured female)*

*They snack the whole day. Unhealthy eating habits. There is a boy here who is very fat and his mother enjoys watching him eat. She says he enjoys her food. And people can talk to her but she won't listen. She even dishes him extra food before he is finished. (urban coloured female)*

## **Myths**

One myth came up in relation to the rural male group:

*The other things that I realize from children, they are very fond of achar and eggs and this speed up the maturity process for girls. (male rural)*

## ***Discussion and Conclusion***

Parents in different parts of South Africa and from different cultures seemed to be remarkably similar in their responses to the nutrition questions. Although their understanding of good nutrition was fair it did seem a bit skimpy and sometimes incorrect. Some of the strategies employed by parents to give their children good nutrition are mentioned, parents seemed to understand the causes of malnutrition and obesity well, there seemed to be an element of blaming the parents of children with both malnutrition and obesity. Advertising seemed to play both a positive and negative role, positive in that one [parent learned about good cheap foods through advertising, and negative in that children nag and pester parents for advertised food. Many children seem not to like food and some parents have strategies to overcome this. Pap and bread seem to be staple food s for children, but most parents do try to provide a balanced diet.