

Opticourses, from research to real life intervention: Developing tools and activities to improve the nutritional quality for price (NOP) ratio of food purchases of socio-economically disadvantaged households in France

Context

Healthy diets are generally more expensive than unhealthy diets, explaining why socially disadvantaged individuals perceive food prices as a barrier to improving their diets. It is especially important for these populations to develop strategies to achieve good nutritional quality with a small budget. An intervention targeting socially disadvantaged populations must take into account their actual beliefs and expectations. A co-construction approach is thus recommended, involving participants at each step of the intervention to maximize its impact.

Small history of the program

The « Opticourses » program was launched in 2010 with a feasibility study¹. This study was followed by an interventional research in 2012-2014², which showed that the participatory workshops of the Opticourses program have the capacity to improve the food purchasing behavior of populations with budgetary constraints³. A transferability study was then conducted in 2015-2016⁴. Since 2017, Opticourses, has started his deployment in the French Southern region by training stakeholders for conducting workshops with low-income people in deprived areas. Opticourses is also spreading within a nation-wide child obesity prevention program named VIF⁵.

Principles of the program

By focusing on household food supply (a daily activity that most adults are familiar with and feel able to handle), the Opticourses program is engaging and pragmatic, in accordance with the principles of health promotion. To maximize its effectiveness, the intervention was designed on the basis of the principles of co-construction and participative research. Participants were involved in the elaboration of the intervention, in order to implement a nonbinding, playful intervention tailored to the target population. This co-construction approach was applied to develop the protocol and the tools of the intervention and evaluation process.

¹ supported by the Health Regional Agency in the South Region of France

² funded by the French National Cancer Institute

³ Perignon M, Dubois C, Gazan R, Maillot M, Muller L, Ruffieux R, Gaigi H, Darmon N. Co-construction and evaluation of a nutrition prevention programme aimed at improving the nutritional quality of food purchases among low-income household. *Current Developments in Nutrition*, 2017; 1 (10) e001107; doi.org/10.3945/cdn.117.001107.S

⁴ supported by the Health Regional Agency in the South Region of France

⁵ <http://vivonsenforme.org/>

Content of the program

Opticourses' workshops (8 to 12 people) include seven distinct activities displayed in four 2h sessions around real food purchases of participants, and games and exchanges aimed at promoting food and food choices of good nutritional quality for their price.

The seven activities of Opticourses are generally divided into 4 sessions:

- The first session presents the workshops and builds confidence and reassurance with participants. Participants exchange with each other about their food purchases. In addition, they are asked to collect their household food purchase receipts over a month in order to get feedbacks from the workshops facilitators.
- The second session is made up with discussions about the classification of foods and their nutritional profile. At the end of the session, a first introduction of the nutritional quality for price (NQP) ratio is provided.
- The third session mainly focuses on the NQP ratio with different games and a specific tool designed to guide participants when purchasing foods: the fair price booklet⁶. This booklet is easy to put in a bag and lists foods with both good nutritional quality and fair price. For each food in the booklet (all of good nutritional quality), a good price, defined as the price below which the food can be considered relatively inexpensive, is presented.
- The fourth session addresses the food beliefs of participants, especially about discount brands and products. During this session, the workshops facilitators provide feedbacks to participants about their household food purchases.

Perspectives

From a research point of view, getting access to new food purchasing data will allow a continuous refinement and innovation in the improvement of the diet for people with budgetary constraints.

Contact

To get more information on the Opticourses program, you can contact the team by mail: [opticourses\(at\)gmail.com](mailto:opticourses(at)gmail.com)

⁶ Dubois C, Tharrey M, Darmon N. Identifying foods with good nutritional quality and fair price ratio for the OPTICOURSES intervention research project. *Public Health Nutrition*, 2017, doi:10.1017/S1368980017002282