

ABSTRACT

The Effects of Breakfast on the Classroom Behaviours of Rural Jamaican Primary School Children

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The effects of giving breakfast on classroom behaviours were examined in 60 undernourished (< -1 sd NCHS) and 60 adequately nourished (≥ -1 sd NCHS) children aged 8-11 years, selected from grades 3 and 4 in four rural Jamaican schools. The children were observed twice, once after receiving breakfast and once after receiving a piece of fruit. The order of treatment was allowed for by randomly assigning the classes either to breakfast or fruit first. The behaviours were observed in teaching and set task situations and included attention to task, talking to another child, gross motor behaviour and responding to teacher. A time sampling method of observation was used.

Results showed that the undernourished group moved around the classroom more than the adequately nourished children. Taller children and those with higher BMIs were more on task and moved around the classroom less. The impact of breakfast varied among the schools but not between nutritional groups. In the school which was better equipped and organized, the children were more attentive ($p < .005$) and moved less ($p < .05$) when they received breakfast compared to when they had no

breakfast. In the schools which were less equipped and disorganized there was no improvement. However in two of these schools, the children's attention to task was less when given breakfast ($p < .02$; $p < .01$) and they talked more in one ($p < .05$).

This suggests that school breakfasts may only benefit children's behaviours in the presence of satisfactory classroom infrastructure.