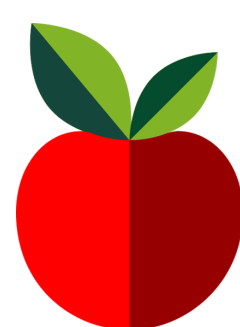


MEDITERRANEAN DIET IDEALS VS. CANTEENS REALITIES: STAKEHOLDERS’ PERSPECTIVES ON THE FOOD OFFER AND THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DM IN UNIVERSITY CANTEENS



AUTHORS

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THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

- The integration of nutritious eating practices, particularly those advocated by the Mediterranean Diet, is **associated with enhanced quality of life and improved academic outcomes** among university students (Gianfredi et al., 2018). However, healthy food options in university settings are frequently limited (Silva et al., 2025).
- Several studies have been dedicated to understanding the eating habits of young people, with a particular focus on adherence to the Mediterranean diet. Brabo et al. (2025) observed that the **majority had a moderate adherence to the Mediterranean diet**. These results are in line with other research (Oliveira et al., 2024) and national data indicating that **only 26% of the Portuguese population has high adherence to the MD** (Gregório et al., 2020).
- Research found that **cafeteria managers, student services and catering companies play a central role in the adoption of healthy diets**, with the availability of technical support, economic viability and the integration of initiatives into the institutional context being identified as key factors (Fonderie et al., 2024).

OBJECTIVE

The aim of this study was to explore **the perceptions and opinions of stakeholders** (i.e., mediators between higher education institutions and companies, canteen managers and employees) about **the food on offer and the implementation of the Mediterranean Diet in Portuguese canteens**.



METHODOLOGY



25 participants recruited through direct contact



rewarded with 15€ vouchers



average age: **40.8 years**



Who are the stakeholders?

Managers, quality directors/nutritionists, cooks, waiters

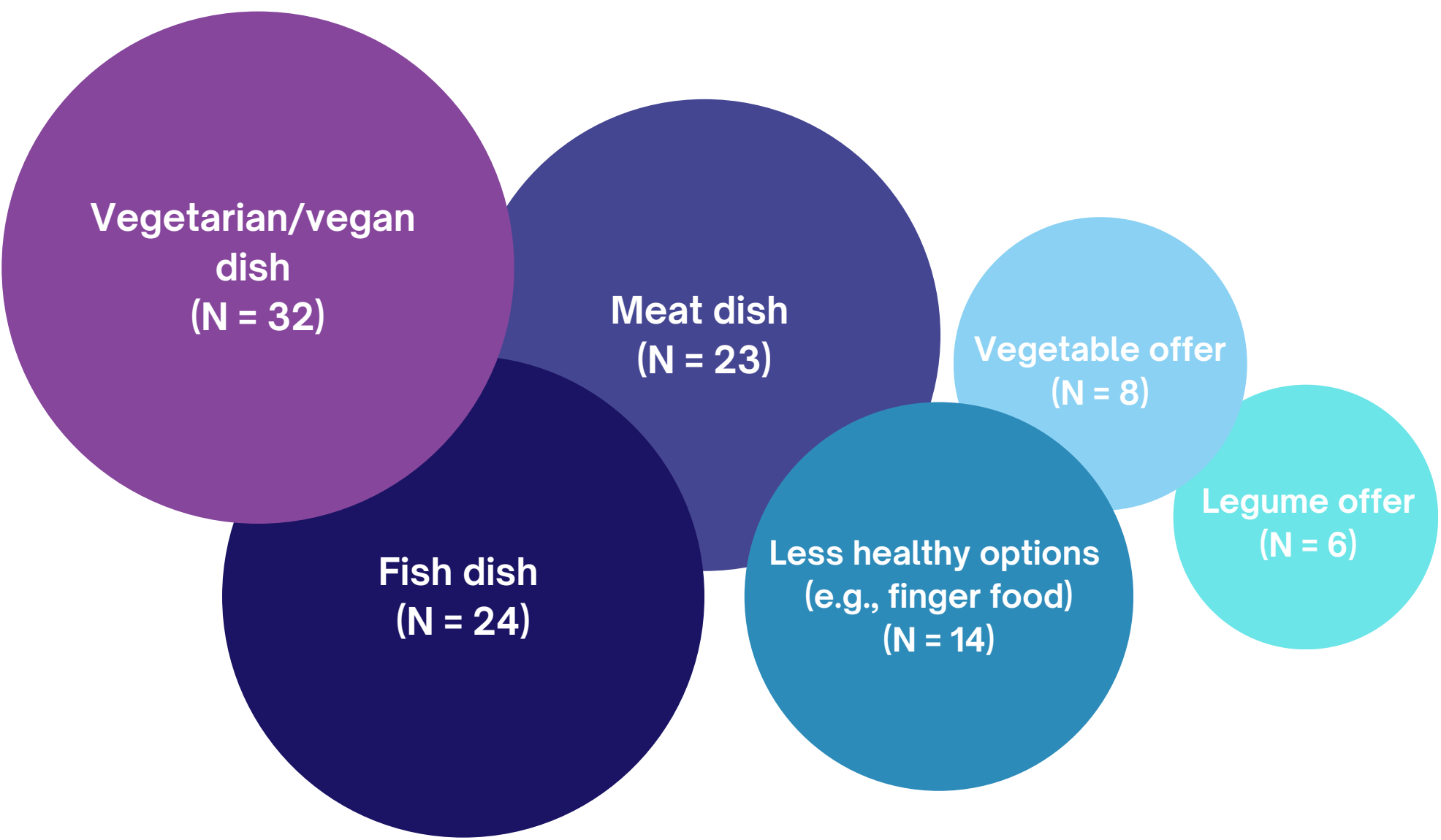


Semi-structured interview | Inductive analysis with the support of the MAXQDA platform

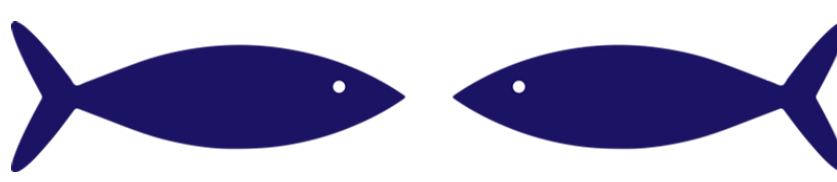
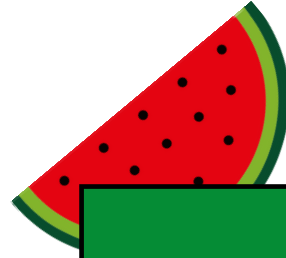
- Sociodemographic and professional characterisation
- Perceptions, knowledge and attitudes towards MD
- MD in the food context of Higher Education Institutions
- Stakeholder involvement

RESULTS


Food Offer in University Canteens



Implementation of MD in University Canteens



Barriers	N	Facilitators	N
Low student participation	18	Simplicity of cooking techniques	7
High cost	8	Employee training	5
Lack of suppliers	6	Protocols	4



- Greater adherence to the meat dish** (N = 9)
 - “And we always notice that the meat always finishes first. And if we had more meat, the others wouldn't even sell out, because people always go ‘What's the meat dish?’ Only when they've run out do they often go vegetarian or fish.” (M, 46 years old, entrepreneur)
- Low adherence to healthier options** (N = 17)
 - “(…) that's what they're looking for out there. It's pizzas, burgers, fried eggs, steaks, french fries. If you had french fries every day, you'd have students every day. Unfortunately this is the truth.” (F, 45 years old, carer)

DISCUSSION

- It was found that, despite the availability of a diverse food offering – including meat and fish dishes, vegetarian options, soups, vegetables, and legumes – **students continue to show a strong preference for meat-based dishes and exhibit low adherence to healthier options**.
- Thus, it is concluded that **promoting effective changes in students’ eating patterns requires an integrated approach**, involving not only improvements in food provision and staff training but also awareness-raising strategies and the active engagement of students themselves. **More robust institutional policies, partnerships with local suppliers, and incentives for the consumption of balanced meals** may contribute to creating a healthier and more sustainable food environment in higher education institutions.

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PROJECT'S WEBSITE

