

Office cake culture: an exploration of its characteristics and associated behaviours and attitudes among UK office workers and implications for workplace health. By L. Walker and O. Flannery, *Department of Clinical Sciences and Nutrition, University of Chester, Parkgate Road, Chester CH1 4BJ.*

The workplace is an important setting for the promotion of healthy lifestyle choices⁽¹⁾. Eating frequency and energy intake from snacking have risen in recent decades⁽²⁾ with cakes and similar sweet baked goods the primary energy contributors to snack food⁽³⁾. Providing such foods for colleagues to share, ‘office cake’ (OC), is a prominent form of workplace snacking and is speculated to lead to increased energy intake and obesity⁽⁴⁾. However no data are available. The present study explored the characteristics of OC consumption and associated attitudes and behaviours to gain insight to its impact on workplace health. OC was defined as cakes and sweet foods supplied by employees or managers to share with colleagues.

A specifically-developed 38-item cross-sectional online questionnaire based on the Theory of Planned Behaviour⁽⁵⁾ was completed by UK office workers in May 2017. Recruitment was through snowball and cluster sampling. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics and cross-tabulations with chi-square tests to test for between-group differences. Significance was set at $p \leq 0.05$.

Nine hundred and forty office workers (39.3% male) participated. OC was available to 86.4% respondents between one and five times/week, 66.5% ate it at least once/week and 36.0% never refused it. For 70.9%, cake was displayed in the main working area and 58.1% said they would be less likely to eat OC if it was out of view. Attitudes and behaviour were significantly affected by gender and age. If OC is available, 41.5% said they often or always eat it, of whom significantly more were men (48.9%) than women (36.6%) and 18-29 year olds (18-29s) (52.3%) than ≥ 50 year olds (≥ 50 s) (35.4%). Overall, women were more concerned than men about the presence and negative consequences of OC. Significantly more women than men strongly agreed/agreed that OC had contributed to weight gain (36.6% and 23.4% respectively), made it harder to eat healthily at work (41.4% and 31.5% respectively) and often/always felt regret after eating it (27.3% and 14.1% respectively). Fewer older respondents than younger approved of OC. Significantly fewer ≥ 50 s than 18-29s strongly agreed/agreed OC is ‘a good thing’ (53.5% and 70.9% respectively) or a good way to show appreciation (59.7% and 82.0% respectively). Over half (58.2%) the respondents found it hard at least sometimes to refuse OC if everyone else is eating it, with significantly more women (25.0%) than men (19.3%) and 18-29s (30.2%) than ≥ 50 s (17.3%) responding ‘often/always’. Almost all (94.8%) respondents considered ideal OC frequency to be once/week or less. The mode ideal frequency was once/month (41.3%).

OC appears to influence the UK office physical eating environment and employee dietary behaviour through increased salience and availability of energy-dense sweet foods and the effects of social influencing. Near consensus on ideal OC frequency suggests that nudge techniques could reduce OC consumption while retaining commensality benefits. These findings have implications for workplace health promotion but more research is needed.

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