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RESEARCH TENDER CALL

TENDER INFORMATION DOCUMENT

Project Reference No.: 11-2015

Project Title:

“Weaning practices on the island of Ireland”


1. Objective/Knowledge Gap

Weaning is a critical part of a child’s development during their first year of life and weaning refers to the introduction of solid foods and gradual decrease in the volume and frequency of breastmilk and powdered infant formula. The WHO recommends that this process starts at 6 months of age (1). Guidelines for parents have been developed in both Northern Ireland (NI) and Republic of Ireland (ROI). The most recent guidelines in both jurisdictions are:

- NI - Weaning made easy moving from milk to family meals (2015)
(<http://www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications/weaning-made-easy-moving-milk-family-meals-english-and-translations>).
- ROI –Feeding your baby: introducing family meals (2015)
(<https://www.healthpromotion.ie/hp-files/docs/HPM00971.pdf>).

The key aim of the current research is to investigate parents’ knowledge, attitudes and their practices around weaning their child(ren) between the ages of 4 and 12 months of age on the island of Ireland. The key objectives are:

- To investigate parents knowledge, attitudes and practices in relation to weaning their child(ren);
- To gain insight into the key barriers and facilitators that parents face when following weaning guidelines with their own child(ren);

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- To investigate the key sources of information and guidance that parents are using that are viewed as both practical and helpful;
- To make recommendations on the future support for parents around weaning guidelines.

2. Background


The WHO recommends holding off from weaning until a child reaches six months of age (http://apps.who.int/gb/archive/pdf_files/WHA55/ea5515.pdf?ua=1). Guidelines for parents in both NI and ROI provide guidance on weaning between the ages of four and six months to allow for natural variation between infants. Weaning is an essential process to support the nutritional requirements of an infant required for optimal growth and development as well as important process in influencing food choice in later life. The timing and the types of foods and drinks introduced all play an important role in contributing to good weaning practices. A study conducted in Dublin between 2004 and 2006 indicated that approximately one fifth of infants were weaned onto solid foods at 12 weeks or less (2). The researchers also found that snacks rich in added sugar and salt and condiments such as gravy were frequently consumed by infants at age 6 months, despite recommendations to avoid such foods. Little published data exists on the island of Ireland on parent's attitudes, knowledge and their behaviour in relation to weaning guidelines. This research will provide such information.

3. Approach

It is proposed that the aims and objectives of the current research are met by using predominantly qualitative research methods such as focus groups with parents within the community setting. This may be complemented with quantitative methods. Creative approaches such as the use of vignettes should be considered for use in the qualitative approach to facilitate open and frank discussions.

4. Technical Specification

- Scope of research
- Qualitative and quantitative work
- Data handling and Reporting
- Quality assurance

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(a) Scope of the research

The scope of the research will involve the following:


- The target audience for this research are parents of infants aged 6 to 14 months who are the main food providers for their child(ren);
- Include both first time parents as well as those with one or more children;
- A community setting will be required for the recruitment as opposed to collecting information in a clinical setting;
- Focus on lower income families due to the increased diet related inequalities experienced by these households;
- Representative of both rural and urban communities;
- Include both NI and ROI to take into account different health structures and sources of information in both jurisdictions.

The research should address the following areas in relation to weaning:

- When to start weaning;
- Identify foods to start with and for various stages of weaning between from 4-12 months;
- Foods to avoid;
- Suitable snacks;
- Suitable drinks;
- Food safety and storage;
- Information and support.

Note: there may be concerns by parents that their child may develop a food allergy/intolerance. This will also need to be explored if these concerns arise.

The research should reflect parents' knowledge, attitude and their behaviour across all stages of weaning that occur up to 12 months of age.

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(b) Qualitative and quantitative research

A full justification and rationale for the proposed methodology (including recruitment strategies) and analytical approach will be required. It will be necessary to indicate for all aspects of the project how the proposed data will be collected, analysed and reported.

The research should be predominantly qualitative in nature. The use of validated questionnaires should be considered to collect some relevant quantitative data.


The contractor is responsible for developing and piloting any topic guide which will be used to facilitate the qualitative discussions. The contractor is encouraged to use tools such as vignettes or visual aids to facilitate a more relevant and open discussion for the participants. The contractor will provide explicit details of all analytical methods. Quality control must be evident in the analysis and in the case of the qualitative research the results must be verified by a second qualitative researcher.

(c) Data Handling and Reporting

1. An interim report (electronic and hardcopy) containing a summary of the findings to date will be submitted to **safefood** at six monthly intervals of the research.
2. The contractor is responsible for collating all results and a final report will be submitted to **safefood** on completion of the study.
3. All forms, documentation and electronic files must be retained by the contractor until further notice from **safefood** in case of issues arising after the completion of the research.

(d) Quality Assurance

1. Ethical approval will be an essential component to the approach where human interventions are involved.
2. The contractor will use validated methods where applicable and will apply best practice quality controls to approaches.

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3. **safefood** can visit contractors during the course of the research to assess how the work is being carried out.

5. Proposed Activities/Deliverables

The proposed activities and deliverables will be dependent on the methodology proposed and will include:

- Submission of 6 monthly interim reports;
- Submission of a final report to be submitted to **safefood** within the 18 month study period.

6. Evaluation of Tenders

The tenders will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

Quality of the proposal:


- ✓ Anticipated deliverables;
- ✓ Research method and facilities;
- ✓ Value for money;
- ✓ Potential for application;
- ✓ Work plan, including the overall timeframe.

Quality of Applicants:

- ✓ Experience in subject area;
- ✓ Quality Assurance and Quality Control measures in place.

7. Duration of Project

Estimated duration of the project: Total of 18 months max. A detailed timescale of research should be submitted by each applicant.

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8. ***Tender Application Forms and Guidelines***

The Tender Application Form and associated Guidelines can be downloaded from www.safefood.eu. They can also be obtained by emailing research@safefood.eu, quoting the project reference number **11-2015**. Alternatively please contact **safefood** as per the details below.

Clodagh Flavin
Research Coordinator
safefood
7 Eastgate Avenue
Eastgate
Little Island
Co. Cork
T45 RX01

Tel: +353 21-2304117
Fax: +353 21-2304111

References

1. World Health Organisation. infant and young child nutrition. Fifty-fourth world health assembly no 54.2. Geneva: 2001.
2. Tarrant RC, Younger KM, Sheridan-Pereira M, White MJ, Kearney JM. Factors associated with weaning practices in term infants: a prospective observational study in Ireland. British Journal of Nutrition. 2010;104(10):1544-54.