# INTRODUCTION

An individual’s food choice plays an important role in determining the risk of gaining too much weight. The food choices are shaped by the kinds of food available at home and outside the home, the so-called food environment. Food environment as defined by the U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention refers to the physical presence of food that surround people and may influence their diet. It is an emerging field of study that looks into the food available in a community and how it relates to people’s diet and health.

In the Philippines, the food environment has undergone considerable change as evidenced by many food establishments now found anywhere. The consumption practice of Filipinos especially in the urban areas has also changed over the years. Based on the 8th National Nutrition Survey of the Department of Science and Technology’s Food and Nutrition Research Institute (DOST-FNRI), nearly half of Filipinos are now consuming foods from away-from-home sources like fastfood restaurants, carinderias and other food establishments. With the proliferation of food establishments across the country, alarming issues on the nutritional content of some foods being offered by them are also mounting. There are studies linking frequent consumption of ready-to-eat or take-away meals with increased intake of calories, saturated fat, and sugary drinks which leads to obesity, higher body fatness, or higher BMI.

The study aimed to characterize the food environment of selected study sites in the country by determining location, number and types of food establishments and describing their menu offerings.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Location and mapping

- Baler, Aurora
- San Jose, Mindoro Occidental
- Malita, Davao Occidental
- Biliran Province
- Batanes Province
- Taguig City
  - Brgy. Tuktukan
  - Brgy. Upper Bicutan

### Classification of food establishment

Figure 2. Classification of food establishments

### Data processing, analysis and results generation

- Data were organized by type of food establishment
- Menu offerings were grouped by food group and type of cooking method used
- Beverages were classified as natural/fresh, sugar-sweetened beverages (SSB), alcoholic beverages
- Descriptive Statistics such as means and percentages were computed using the STATA software

### Characterization through face-to-face interview

1. Identification of type of meals offered
2. Enumeration of menu offerings or food and beverages sold
3. Identification of health promotions

Figure 3. Face-to-face interview with food establishment staff
Carinderia and turo-turo were the predominant types of food establishments found across study sites.

Low proportion of different food establishments offer fruits and vegetables in all study sites.
Further studies on food environment are recommended taking into consideration other provinces and highly urbanized cities in order to provide baseline data that policymakers and program implementers could use to address the problem of obesity.

RESULTS

Sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs) were the most common beverage offered in food establishments across study sites. It is noteworthy that alcoholic beverages were also being offered in carinderias in Baler, Aurora, Batanes and Biliran.

CONCLUSIONS

- Turo-turo and carinderia were the most common types food establishment among study sites.
- Fruits and vegetables were not commonly available in all types of food establishments.
- Sugar-sweetened beverages were the most popular beverage offered in food establishments.
- With food items or dishes high in fats and sugars known to contribute to obesity readily available and accessible in widespread food establishments such as carinderias and turo-turos, the Philippines may be moving towards an obesogenic food environment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Further studies on food environment are recommended taking into consideration other provinces and highly urbanized cities in order to provide baseline data that policymakers and program implementers could use to address the problem of obesity.