



Evaluation of Online Multi-Disciplinary Fussy Eating Workshop

Dr Fiona Moloney¹, Gráinne Mallon¹, Mairead Aherne¹, Dr Niamh Bird²

¹ Primary Care Dietitian Service, Dublin South, Kildare & West Wicklow Community Healthcare

² Primary Care Psychology Service, Dublin South, Kildare & West Wicklow Community Healthcare

The authors would also like to acknowledge the contribution made by all the Senior Paediatric Dietitians to the Fussy Eating Workshop in Dublin South, Kildare & West Wicklow Community Healthcare



Background



Fussy eating accounts for approximately one-third of referrals to the Primary Care Dietetics service in North Kildare. International evidence has shown that this cohort, although they may be growing appropriately, can be at very high nutritional risk with regard to micronutrients such as iron, calcium, Vitamin A and Vitamin D. Thus high referral rate is a pressure point on the service leading to longer waiting lists. Evidence shows that fussy eating is linked to heightened parental anxiety and negatively affects family mealtime dynamics¹. Due to low attendance at in-person workshops, an online format was introduced in 2023 to better support parents concerned about the limited variety in their child's diet.

Aim

To evaluate the effectiveness of an online multidisciplinary workshop delivered to parents in North Kildare in 2024 and 2025. We sought to measure changes in parental understanding, concern, and confidence, and to identify which workshop components were most useful. A further aim was to explore the acceptability of the online format to inform future service delivery.

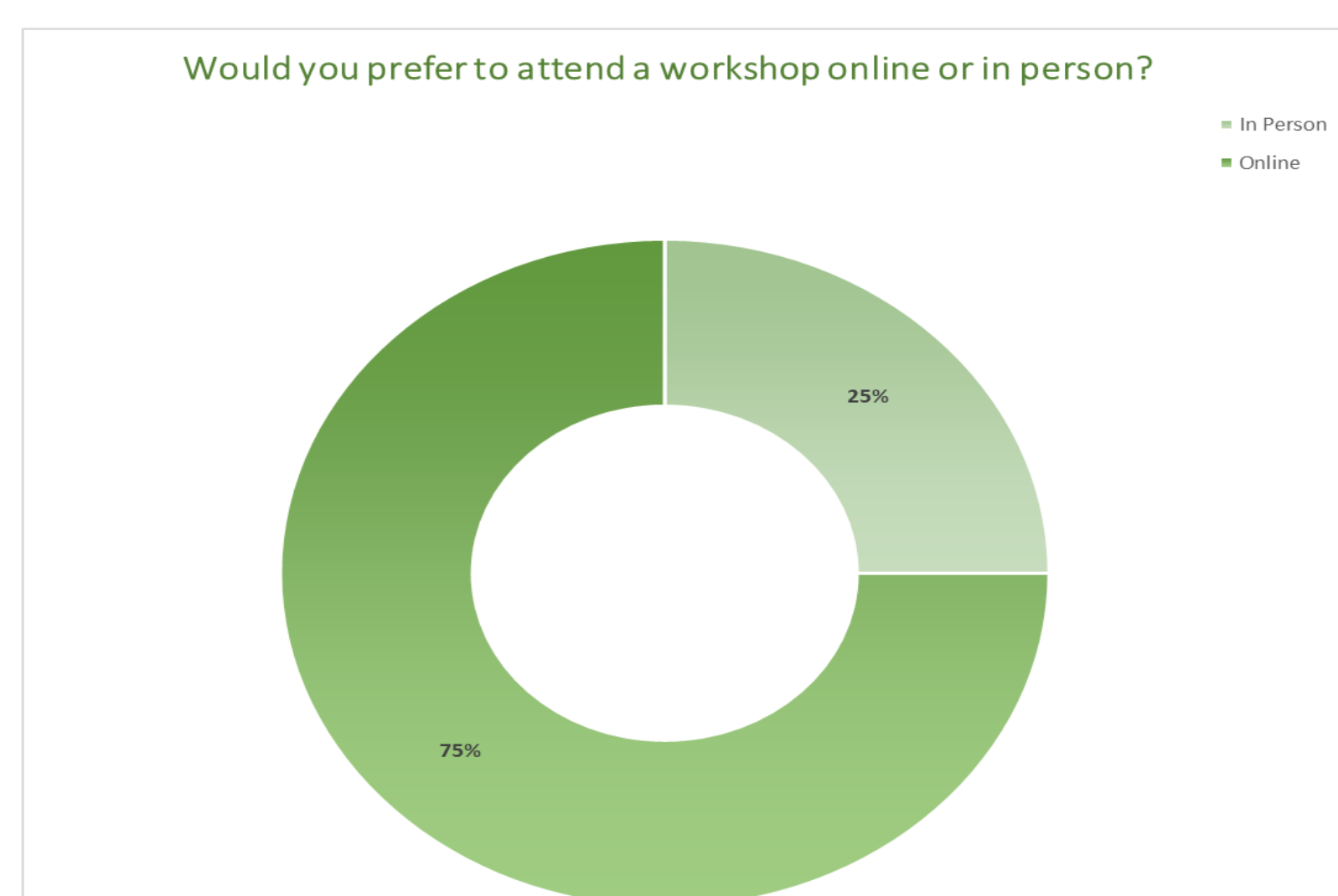
Methods

Parents of eligible referred children were invited to attend two online workshops co-facilitated by Dietetics and Psychology (total duration: 5 hours). Following attendance, parents were asked to complete an evaluation form designed to capture both quantitative and qualitative feedback.



Are families interested in attending an online workshop?

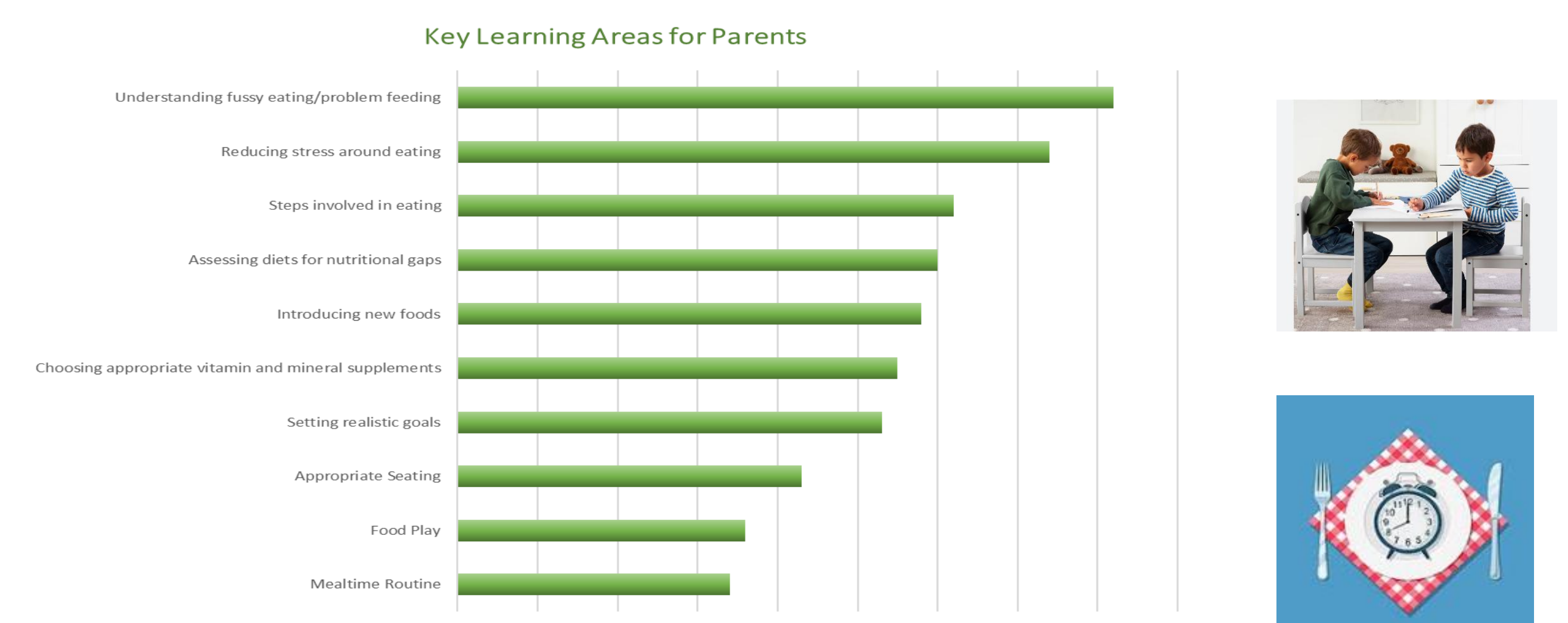
A total of 75 parents attended the online workshops. Of these, 43 parents completed the evaluation, representing a 65% response rate. Among those who responded, 75% reported that they preferred attending the workshop in an online format.



"I really liked that the sessions were held remotely – that worked extremely well for me, as I only needed to take 2.5 hours off work and didn't have to factor in travel time. It meant I didn't need to take a full day off from the office, which made a huge difference."

Do parents learn anything?

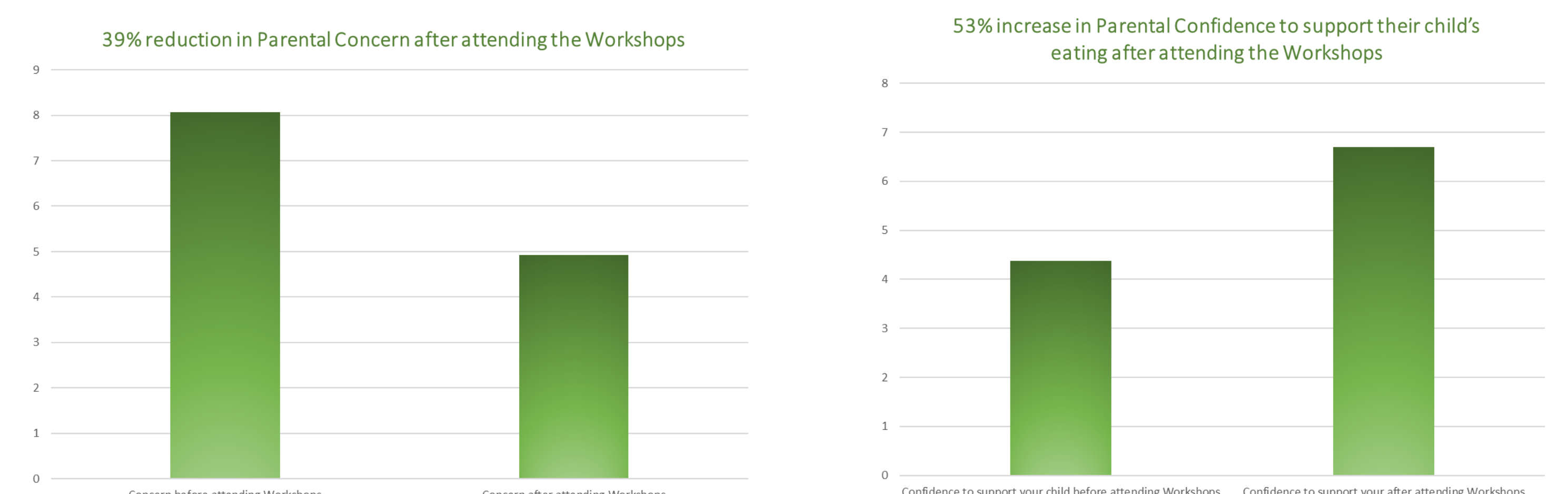
Almost all participants (97%) reported learning new information.



Emerging trends in more recent workshops was parents appreciation for more in-depth information on neurodiversity and sensory sensitivities being covered as well as understanding their own relationship with food.

What about parental stress?

Reduction in stress is key for a more positive mealtime experience. After the workshop parents reported a 39% reduction in concern and a 53% increase in confidence in supporting their child's eating.



Does the online Workshop meet parents needs?

100% of parents reported they enjoyed the sessions/were glad they attended.

"Very informative, very safe space and understanding, helpful advice."

"I think this has helped me to calm down on the pressure I'm putting on myself on how much he is eating."

"We are going to change how we talk about food and try to take any (unintentional) pressure off our son....."we got lots of new ideas"

Conclusion

Online multidisciplinary workshops effectively reduce parental anxiety and increase confidence in managing fussy eating. This approach offers an accessible, acceptable, and impactful method of supporting families facing this common childhood challenge. Future recommendation is introduction of a pre course screening tool to identify families most likely to benefit, increase workshop uptake and guide ongoing programme development.

¹ Fraser, K., Markides, B.R., Barrett, N., & Laws, R. (2021). Fussy eating in toddlers: A content analysis of parents' online support seeking. Maternal & Child Nutrition, 17 (3), e13171.