

**THE GRADUATE COLLEGE OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA HEALTH SCIENCES CENTER**

ANNOUNCES THE FINAL EXAMINATION OF

KATHERYN J. SWYDEN

*FOR THE DEFENSE OF THE DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY DEGREE
GRADUATE COLLEGE
DEPARTMENT OF ALLIED HEALTH SCIENCES*

*Wednesday, July 27, 2016, 10:00 a.m.
Room 1046, College of Allied Health, OUHSC*

***Family Structure As Moderator of Family Meal Frequency:
A Study from the National Survey of Children's Health
2011-2012***



COMMITTEE IN CHARGE: Susan B. Sisson, Ph.D., RDN, CHES, FACSM, Chair; Beth DeGrace, Ph.D., Allen Knehans, Ph.D., Amanda S. Morris, Ph.D., Ashley E. Weedn, M.D., MPH

ABSTRACT: The family meal is the most practiced of all family rituals and influences adolescent well-being. This study took advantage of the rich data from the 2011-2012 National Survey of Children's Health to explore family meal frequency, family structure, and well-being in adolescents. The results from this study indicate the family meal has direct, healthful influences upon the physical, social, and psychological well-being of adolescents, regardless of family structure. However, adolescents from non-traditional family structures had lower odds of frequent meals and lower well-being than the traditional, two-parent, biological family structure. Further, nearly one-third of all adolescents dined with their families three or less times per week. The family meal is an integral component of well-being within the family, in particular among adolescents from non-traditional family structures. It is important to engage adolescents in regular family mealtimes and focus on both frequency and quality by limiting media use and ensuring quality communication. We must consider the complexity of mealtimes and families when encouraging families to continue the important ritual of shared meals. More research is needed to determine the specific elements of the family meal, such as location, duration, family connectedness and conflict, to provide enhanced clarity on this multifaceted relationship and improve meal frequency for all families.