

Children's Food Choice in Scotland: Views of Policy Stakeholders

Current debate on children's food choice, identifies a link between demand for HFSS foods and advertising directed specifically at those under 16 years of age. However, although further market regulation of advertising has been the preferred mechanism for changing food choice in recent years, this study aims to examine views of relevant stakeholders with regard to the role of marketing and children's food choice.

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Much recent debate in the UK surrounding children's diet has focussed on the possible link between the marketing of food high in fat, salt and sugar (HFSS) and children's poor health. The link is presumed to be strong enough to convince national consumer groups such as *Which?*, Sustain, Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People and the Food Standards Agency to campaign for the stringent restrictions on these the advertising of HFSS foods. Further restrictions in the form of a self-regulatory Code of Advertising Practice (BCAP) came into force in September 2010 identifying explicitly times of day and television programme content as imperative to advertisers when considering the marketing of such food products. However, the food industry association, the Food and Drink Federation and the Food Advertising Unit suggest that restricting advertising is not the most effective method to tackle child health and diet problems and have identified alternative measures they believe would have a greater impact.

This exploratory study aims to examine the views of 10 key stakeholder organisations with regard to the perceived relationship between marketing of HFSS food and drinks aimed specifically at children and children's food choices. Furthermore, the views of stakeholder organisations will be considered with regard to the role of parents, level of education and peers in influencing children's food choice.

Results identify that although there is a majority view that restrictions can encourage positive behaviour changes, the issue was not always as transparent to other stakeholders. Further restrictions on advertising were identified as resulting in a reduction of consumer choice which would not necessarily reduce demand for HFSS foods. However, poor food choice as a result of a lack of basic food skills (including preparation and cooking) was an emerging theme which was identified as a possible mechanism for encouraging behaviour change within children's food choice. This theme was identified from not just the food industry associations but also local community consumer groups working with individual families. Therefore, this result in particular has implications not necessarily for the level of regulation within this market, but specifically for the provision of education targeted at both children and adults within households in order to further inform food choice through increasing food preparation skills.

Endnotes

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