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A study investigating sociodemographic factors and food preferences of primary school children in the United Kingdom

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Background/Objectives: Substantial links between childhood obesity and socioeconomic status in the United Kingdom highlight that deprived areas are associated with an obesogenic environment⁽¹⁾, Public Health interventions aimed at improving health outcomes of deprived communities have faced challenges in achieving their objectives⁽²⁾. However, there is a lack of a definitive method to measure deprivation, with several proposed solutions including the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)⁽³⁾, Minimum Income standards, pioneered by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF)⁽⁴⁾, and a Consensual Approach pioneered by Breadline Britain proposing solutions⁽⁵⁾. The aim of this study was to develop and deploy a photographic, emoji based, Likert questionnaire to determine whether food preferences of UK primary school children were influenced by sociodemographic status.

Methods: 73 parent-child dyads were recruited through online and social media channels to complete a two-part questionnaire. Part one captured demographic data from parents, with part two completed by the child using an emoji Likert format to determine liking of foods. Each section of the questionnaire was scored to obtain a demographic score, and food score for each dyad which were analysed to determine relationships. Postcode data was captured to enable participant results to be ranked according to IMD decile with each postcode being placed in a decile from 1 (most deprived) to 10 (least deprived).

Results: There were no significant associations between food score results and socioeconomic scores based on IMD postcode ranking ($p > 0.05$), except one negative significant correlation between affluent postcode deciles and children's recalled liking of processed foods ($r = -1.000$, $p < 0.05$) as determined by Spearman's Correlation Analysis. There was no significant relationship between demographic and food scores between participants living in most deprived (1–3) and least deprived (8–10) deciles ($p > 0.05$) as determined by a Mann-Whitney U test.

Discussion / Conclusion: This study found no links between socioeconomic factors, as determined by the JRF, and the food preferences of UK primary school children aged 4–11 years old. This study, completed during the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020–2021, highlighted the lack of clarity that remote, recalled responses provide in a time where there has been a change in consumer behaviours and social experience within populations. A qualitative approach considering nutritional behavioural factors in conjunction with socio-economical and consumer behaviour patterns is likely to provide an in depth understanding into the post-pandemic changing landscape of deprivation.

References

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Disclosure of Interest

None Declared