



Sociodemographic differences in exposure to high fat, salt and sugar food and drink advertising

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About the research

Advertising of products high in fat, salt and sugar (HFSS) is associated with increased consumption of these products. Some groups have been found to be more exposed to HFSS advertising, including socioeconomically disadvantaged groups. This may contribute to the higher prevalence of obesity and diet-related diseases we see in disadvantaged groups.

Regulation of food and drink advertising has been increasingly recommended as a policy lever for obesity prevention. Some Local Authorities have already taken action in this space (e.g. Bristol and Southwark). However, little is known about their potential impact across different social groups. The aim of this study was to investigate whether there were sociodemographic differences in advertising exposure and whether advertising exposure was associated with obesity.

A total of 1,552 adults completed a survey in February 2019, reporting their exposure to HFSS advertising in the past 7 days for different HFSS products, digital food delivery services (delivery apps such as Deliveroo and JustEat) and in different advertising settings. All participants were members of the Kantar Fast Moving Consumers Goods panel and lived in either London or the North of England.

Key findings

- **Most adults are exposed to HFSS advertising** – 85% of participants reported seeing or hearing some form of HFSS advertising in the past 7 days.
- **Socioeconomic position** – Lower socioeconomic groups were ~50% more likely to have seen or heard HFSS advertising compared to the high socioeconomic group.
- **Age** – Younger adults were more than twice as likely to be exposed to advertising for delivery apps and digital advertising (e.g. online and video games) compared to older adults.
- **Advertising setting** – Lower socioeconomic groups were more likely to be exposed to digital and traditional advertising (e.g. television and leaflets) than the high socioeconomic group; younger adults were more likely to be exposed to digital advertising than older adults.
- **Obesity** – Being exposed to advertising for delivery apps, digital advertising and advertising in recreational environments (e.g. cinema, leisure centre or community event) was associated with obesity.

About the School

The NIHR School for Public Health Research is a partnership between the Universities of Sheffield; Bristol; Cambridge; Imperial; and University College London; The London School for Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM); LiLaC – a collaboration between the Universities of Liverpool and Lancaster; and Fuse - The Centre for Translational Research in Public Health a collaboration between Newcastle, Durham, Northumbria, Sunderland and Teesside Universities.

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Policy implications

- Advertising exposure is greater among socioeconomically disadvantaged groups and younger adults.
- Advertising restrictions could have a greater impact on groups known to have poorer diet quality and help to reduce inequalities in diet.
- Advertising restrictions have so far focused on television, but given the prevalence of exposure in other settings, other advertising restrictions may need to be considered.
- Advertising in some settings, particularly through digital channels, is associated with obesity, which provides support for advertising restrictions as a tool for obesity prevention.



Further information

The BMJ Open journal article detailing this work can be found here:
<https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/11/4/e048139>

This work forms part of the NIHR School of Public Health Research work on [evaluating the impact of the removal of 'junk-food' advertising on public transport networks in London](#)

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