Beyond Food Promotion: A Systematic Review on the Influence of the Food Industry on Obesity-Related Behaviour Among Children

While several factors have been identified as potential determinants to explain the growth of the childhood overweight and obesity epidemics, the development of “obesogenic environments” have been identified as a key contributor. As a highly discussed risk factor, the primary aim of this review was to identify the nature and extent of food industry influences and how they might affect unhealthy dietary behaviour. A secondary objective of this review was to detect overlapping patterns across these environments and how these activities might affect children’s attitudes towards food, intake patterns and their weight.

The 36 included studies highlighted six key obesogenic environments through which the food industry influences obesity-related dietary behaviours in children: schools, retailers, mass media “television”, mass media “internet”, home and promotional campaigns. The findings therefore point to a need to shift away from a child-centric perspective and focus on an upstream perspective that takes into account the direct influence of key obesogenic food environments on children.