Economic incentives and nutritional behavior of children in the school setting: A systematic review

Childhood obesity is an increasing concern globally. Among potential interventions that could generate positive change, “changes in the economic environment should be considered to promote healthier eating and physical activity as ways to help curb the obesity epidemic.” Particularly, economic motives may play a role in the school environment as it could impact the availability of foods and beverages offered to children. This systematic review aimed “to examine the existing literature on the effectiveness of economic incentives for producing sound nutritional behaviour in schools.” Economic incentives come in many forms and can serve to reinforce or enable behaviours and they have the ability to affect the nutritional environment in multiple ways.

28 studies reported in 30 publications met the criteria for inclusion in the review. Overall, “studies reviewed support the hypothesis that the choice of foods, snacks, and beverages by schoolchildren can be influenced by economic incentives.” Interestingly, it was also found that “economic incentives may indirectly influence nutritional behaviour via the physical environment at schools in terms of incentives to provide a nutritious food environment and via the political environment in terms of incentives to undertake (and emphasise) nutrition education and encourage activities at schools.