Influence of unhealthy food and beverage marketing on children’s dietary intake and preference: a systematic review and meta-analysis of randomised trials

As the rates of overweight and obesity among children are increasing globally, unhealthy diet has been identified as the leading risk factor for death and disability globally. Increasing evidence is arising linking the children-directed marketing of unhealthy food and beverages and the negative impacts it has on their eating behaviours. The aim of this study was to systematically review all randomised controlled trials involving children aged 2 to 18 years that evaluated the impact of unhealthy food and beverage marketing compared with non-active control on dietary intake and preference.

26 studies were included in this review. Overall, findings suggested that younger children are more susceptible to the effects of food and beverage marketing regarding the quality and quantity of food they consume. There also seems to be a gender disparity, with boys being more susceptible to the impact of food and beverage marketing in terms of caloric intake. Modelling studies have suggested that banning television advertisements of foods high in fat, sugar and/or salt could reduce overweight and obesity in childhood by 18% and 2.5% respectively. Overall, this systematic review supports the need to review and implement public policy on child-targeted unhealthy food and beverage marketing.