

What determines obesity-related behaviours in young children?

- Obesity is common even in young children and habits formed in early life persist.
- A literature review on factors influencing behaviour has helped identify which ones to target with interventions to change behaviour.
- Parenting practices, such as role modelling, monitoring and feeding practices, are important influences across all behaviours
- Provider training and nutrition policies are also positive influences in the early years setting.

Socio-ecological model of determinants



Behavioural Determinant → Behaviour → Obesity/overweight

Our reviews provide understanding of these factors to identify which are modifiable and can be targeted in a future intervention

The link between behaviour and obesity already established

1 in 5 children are overweight or obese when they start school and obesity tracks into later life, hence early prevention is important

Key issues

- Obesity is common even in young children and habits formed in early life persist.
- In order to change behaviour we need to understand the factors that influence the behaviour.
- Factors influencing children's behaviours act at multiple levels (child, parents/family, childcare/preschool, community, policy).
- The study found that parental practices and early years settings (childcare/preschool) influenced young children's behaviour.
- It found unhealthy behaviours cluster (e.g. sugar-sweetened beverage intake & TV viewing) and may be targeted together.

What we did

A literature review was conducted on the factors influencing:

1. Sugar sweetened beverage intake
2. Fruit & vegetable intake and
3. Physical activity & sedentary behaviours

in children under seven with the aim of informing interventions/policies to change these behaviours.

What next?

Knowledge gained from these reviews will inform early life obesity prevention interventions and guide future research.

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Findings and implications

- Multi-level interventions (child, parents, early years settings) show promise in changing obesity-related behaviours in young children.
- Parental practices and factors in the early years settings are important modifiable determinants of these behaviours and should be targeted in future interventions.
- Research in this age-group is recent (mainly since 2007) and very few community or policy-level interventions have been evaluated.
- Sustainability, scalability and impact on inequalities need to be considered in future interventions.

References:

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