

Wellness and Public Health

Is there an association between diet quality and weight status of black children from African and Caribbean descent families living in Ottawa?

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Introduction: The easy access and low cost of ready-to-eat and prepackaged foods, also known as ultra-processed products (UPP), have contributed to the consumption of diets of poorer quality. UPP are high in salt, sugar and saturated fats in addition to containing additives not usually found in conventional kitchens. Scientific evidence also suggests that the consumption of UPP increases the risk of developing chronic disease such as obesity. In Canada, more than half of children's daily energy intake comes from UPP.

Objective: To assess the association between black children's diet quality and their weight status.

Methods: Between 2014-2015, 203 Black mothers of African and Caribbean descent and their 6-to-12 years old child living in Ottawa were recruited. Children's food intake was assessed with a 24-hour dietary recall. Diet quality was evaluated using the contribution of UPP to their daily energy intake using the NOVA food classification system, which classifies foods into four categories: unprocessed or minimally processed foods, processed culinary ingredients, processed foods, and UPP. The International Obesity Task Force references were used to determine children's weight status. Weight status were classified into two categories: underweight/normal weight and overweight/obesity. T-tests were performed in SPSS to assess the association between children's proportion of energy intake from the NOVA categories and their weight status.

Results: Nearly 38% of participating children had overweight/obesity. Children consumed about 58% of their daily energy intake from UPP. Children's weight status was not significantly associated with children's contribution of unprocessed or minimally processed foods, processed culinary ingredients, processed foods or UPP.

Conclusion: These results suggest that weight status was not associated with the diet quality of black children participating in this study. Longitudinal studies should assess the impact of such high consumption of UPP on children's nutritional health in the long term.

Significance: Dietitians working with this population should keep promoting a healthy diet rich in fresh and minimally processed foods, which could help prevent overweight and obesity.

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