

# Fighting Childhood Obesity: A Call for Effective Policies on Unhealthy Food Marketing

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Journal For International Medical Graduates

## Abstract:

Childhood obesity is a significant public health concern with long-term health consequences for children. Despite various efforts to promote healthy lifestyles, statistics continue to indicate upward trends for overweight youths. Companies marketing unhealthy foods to children are contributing to this problem, making it necessary to implement mandatory guidelines and policy solutions. Evidence-based interventions, including education about nutrition and physical activity, are effective in reducing the prevalence of childhood obesity. Other countries have implemented policies to regulate unhealthy food marketing to children, which can serve as models for the US. The amount of money spent on advertising sugary drinks and unhealthy foods to children is staggering, and advertising restrictions could reduce childhood obesity rates. Effective policy solutions are necessary to address the issue and promote healthy lifestyles for our children.

## Key words:

Food marketing, Unhealthy foods, Policy solutions, Evidence-based interventions, Nutritional education, Physical activity, Sedentary behavior, Passive activities, Fast food, Advertisements.

## Introduction

The worrisome increase of childhood obesity has caught the attention of public health advocates, becoming one of the most significant challenges to tackle during this century [1]. This is due to its adverse impact on virtually every bodily function in children, from their heart and lungs down to their muscles and bones while also affecting organs such as kidneys or digestive tract; making it a problem that requires immediate action given that these consequences can be long-term or

fast foods, with 9% being allocated towards other food categories, and a minimal less than one percent being allocated to the promotion of fruits and vegetables [8]. This disproportionate allocation of funds towards marketing can lead to a detrimental effect of children's health and wellness, promoting unhealthy foods, and leading to the rise of childhood obesity.

## Will it work?

In 2009, Veerman and colleagues conducted a study relevant to the issue of unhealthy food marketing and childhood obesity [9]. They constructed a mathematical simulation model which was able to show that the prevalence of childhood obesity in the US could be reduced if advertising of unhealthy food on television was restricted or banned [9]. Specifically, the study found a significant improvement, with a reduction of obesity in children from one in three children to one in seven children [9]. These findings highlight the potential impact of advertising on children's food choices and the role of implementing effective policy solutions which can address this issue.

## Conclusions

Childhood obesity is a serious problem that requires action. Evidence-based interventions, including nutritional education and promoting physical activity, can help. Other countries have implemented policies to regulate unhealthy food marketing to children, which can serve as models for the US. The amount of money spent on advertising sugary drinks and unhealthy foods to children is staggering, and a study suggests that advertising restrictions could reduce childhood obesity rates. We need effective policy solutions to address the issue and promote healthy lifestyles for our children.

lifelong [2]. It's worth mentioning that there are social implications too which should not be neglected since obesity can lead towards isolation impeding emotional growth further exacerbated by societal stigmatization [2]. Furthermore, research indicates a connection between early-onset weight issues with lifelong chronic conditions into adulthood [3]. Despite various efforts aimed at curbing childhood obesity rates through campaigns focused on awareness, educational programs promoting healthy eating habits and active lifestyles, statistics continue indicating upward trends for overweight youths. However, we will explore possible policy solutions targeting food marketing practices deemed harmful.

The implications of childhood obesity carry on beyond youth. Children who are obese have an increasingly greater risk of remaining so into adulthood, which heightens the risk for disease and disabilities in later life [3]. Over the last three decades, obesity rates have greatly increased across the United States (US) [4]. In present day, the US has one out six children classified as overweight while approximately a third could be considered obese or overweight [4]. In 2021 alone within Florida's public middle-schools & high schools combined there were above 32% reported being overweight or obese according to data obtained by Florida Health Charts department [5]. These alarming statistics highlight the urgency for effective policies to combat childhood obesity and encourage healthy lifestyle changes.

Companies involved in the production of food have utilized various strategies to advertise and promote unhealthy foods exclusively targeted at children such as high-sugar drinks and fast-food. These marketing schemes' consequences on children's physical health are too significant to disregard. Self-regulatory measures are inadequate to curb the adverse outcomes created by advertising unhealthy foods to children. Consequently, mandatory guidelines and policy solutions are needed. These should include comprehensive regulations.

## Discussion

### Evidence-based interventions to reduce childhood obesity

The issue of childhood obesity is complex and needs a multifaceted approach to its solution [6]. There are numerous interventions based on scientific research that have proven effective in reducing the prevalence of childhood obesity, including education about nutrition, encouraging physical activity or exercise routines as

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well as making changes to sedentary behavior via modification strategies for healthy behaviors [6]. In addition to this intervention advice, decreasing time spent engaging in passive activities such as gaming or watching television can also make significant contributions towards addressing the problem at hand [6]. It's essential that families become an integral part of these initiatives by providing support throughout this process; ensuring children grow up within supportive environments where they learn how best practices around healthier lifestyle choices operate which will lead them into adulthood with a lowered risk [6]. By enacting evidence-based measures like those outlined above we take enormous strides towards promoting future generations' health targets while combating current problems surrounding excess weight gain among children.

#### **Actions taken by other countries on food marketing to children**

Multiple nations have undertaken measures to combat the issue of advertising unhealthy food products toward children [7]. For instance, some countries introduced prohibitions on fast-food advertisements aimed at minors under 13 years in print and electronic media channels [7]. They established limitations on marketing campaigns targeting individuals under the age of 14, for foods containing high calories, saturated fat content, high sugar, or sodium content [7]. In addition to these restrictions, many countries also prevent advertisers from utilizing cartoons and toys when endorsing junk foods since they might seem appealing specifically to kids [7]. Certain regions require educational labels displayed alongside ads for items with added fats such as sweeteners or sodium substances; this includes a message highlighting dietary concepts specific within them [7].

These actions carried out by various countries can serve as exemplary models exhibiting effective policies focusing primarily upon curbing unsuitable food product promotions directed towards younger audiences. By replicating similar policies adopted elsewhere, the United States can foster a healthier environment and subsequently lead to the reduction in childhood obesity.

#### **Food marketing towards children**

The amount of money spent on marketing aimed at children and teens is a staggering 1.8 billion dollars yearly [8]. Of note, about 51% are directed toward promoting sugar-loaded beverages, sugary cereals, sweets and snacks; another 40% were spent promoting

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