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# Parental Feeding Behaviour and Childhood Obesity

## Researchers

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## Summary

Although much is known about the aetiology of obesity, the underlying psychological and social reasons why it occurs in childhood are complex and remain unclear. This project aims to explore the influence of parents on childhood obesity; through their knowledge of nutrition, perceptions of healthy eating, awareness of

obesity and associated risks, and subsequent food choice and child feeding behaviours. The study used quantitative methods to investigate these influences and look for associations with local/national prevalence of childhood obesity.

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## Research questions

- How do parents' knowledge of nutrition and perceptions of healthy eating influence their food choice and child-feeding behaviours?
- How does parents' awareness of obesity and associated risks influence their food choice and child-feeding behaviours?
- How do parents' child-feeding behaviours influence childhood overweight/obesity?



## Research design

A comprehensive literature review identified gaps and themes in the research, to enable development of a useful and valid survey instrument. The review included quantitative and qualitative research, from medical (nutrition), social and behavioural science journals. A survey was completed by parents of primary school children (4 to 11 years) in different locations in Sheffield. Parents were asked to complete a questionnaire about 'child health and nutrition'. Data on childhood obesity (local/national) were used in the statistical analysis to look for associations between childhood obesity and other identified variables.

## Key findings

- Two hundred and ten parents of children aged four to eleven years were recruited in three primary schools in two contrasting electoral wards in Sheffield. A cross sectional survey using the Parental Feeding Style Questionnaire was completed and mean scores were calculated for five child-feeding behaviours: control over eating, emotional feeding, encouragement/promoting, instrumental feeding and restriction. Parents' self-reported child feeding behaviours were compared with their socio demographic characteristics.
- Parents in the least deprived ward reported using all five types of child feeding behaviours more frequently than parents in the most deprived ward. After adjusting for parent sex, parent age, single parent status, employment status and level of education, emotional feeding was the only behaviour showing any evidence of a difference between the wards. The most frequently used behaviours were control, encouragement and restriction - behaviours that might be used to directly influence children's food intake and weight.
- Child feeding behaviours differ between areas within a single city and within a largely white population, and this distribution is related to socio-economic and educational factors. Experimental and longitudinal studies are needed to further investigate the potential role of child feeding behaviours in childhood overweight and obesity.

## Publications

Clark H R, Goyder E, Bissell P, Blank L and Peters J (2007) How do parents' child feeding behaviours influence child weight? Implications for childhood obesity policy. *Journal of Public Health* 29: 132-141.

Clark H R, Goyder E, Bissell P, Blank L, Walters S J and Peters J (2008) A pilot survey of socio-economic differences in child feeding behaviours among parents of primary school children. *Public Health Nutrition* 11: 1030-36.