



The  
University  
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Sheffield.

Changing Families,  
Changing Food.

# Parental food choice and childhood obesity

## Principal Investigators

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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 will use quantitative methods to investigate these influences and look for associations with local/national prevalence of childhood obesity.

Royal Holloway  
University of London

The Leverhulme Trust

[www.sheffield.ac.uk/familiesandfood](http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/familiesandfood)

## 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 will identify gaps and themes in the research, to enable development of a useful and valid survey instrument. The review will include quantitative and qualitative research, from medical (nutrition), social and behavioural science journals.

A survey will be completed by parents of primary school children (4 to 11 years) in different locations in Sheffield. Parents will be asked to complete a questionnaire about 'child health and nutrition'.

Data on childhood obesity (local/national) will be used in the statistical analysis to look for associations between childhood obesity and other identified variables. Suggestions will be made for further research.

## The 'Changing Families, Changing Food' Programme

'*Changing Families, Changing Food*' is a major inter-disciplinary research programme, funded by The Leverhulme Trust. The Programme began in October 2005 and will run for just over three years.

It is organised into three research strands on: pregnancy and motherhood; childhood and family life; and family and community. Focusing on contemporary Britain, the Programme also includes some international comparisons and a 'time-line' to establish the quantitative and qualitative nature of social changes affecting families and food over the last century.

The Programme is coordinated by Peter Jackson (Director of Research for the Social Sciences at Sheffield University) and is based in ICoSS (the University's new social science facility). The Programme involves colleagues from Clinical Sciences, East Asian Studies, Geography, Nursing and Midwifery, the School for Health and Related Research and Sociological Studies at Sheffield in collaboration with colleagues in Health and Social Care at Royal Holloway, University of London.

The research takes food as the lens through which to observe recent changes in family life and examines how changes in family form have affected patterns of food consumption. The Programme's findings are expected to contribute to current debates about obesity and nutrition, media and consumption, food choice and deprivation.

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