

Children's choices influenced by dominance of junk food marketing

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The extent to which Scotland's children are being directly influenced by junk food marketing is uncovered in a report for the Scottish Government by researchers at the University of Stirling.

Stirling's Institute of Social Marketing was commissioned to investigate the impact of food and drink marketing on Scotland's young people.

In a study of school children, researchers were able to measure just how much the marketing landscape is dominated by promotions for [junk food](#) - food and drinks high in fat, salt and sugar. Young people aged 11 to 18 years old were asked about the marketing and promotions they had

been exposed to in the preceding seven days and how they had responded to them.

They were asked if they had seen food and drink marketing involving broadcast, print, outdoor or digital adverts, sponsorship, price promotions and social media activity.

Three quarters of the marketing seen was for junk food, with visibility of healthy food and drinks' marketing reported at only ten percent. Almost two thirds of the 2285 children questioned recalled one or more food or drink promotion with nearly half buying more than one or more item of food or drink in response.

Report author Georgina Cairns, senior researcher in dietary public health and behaviour change at the University of Stirling said: "Although we knew the visibility of marketing for food and drinks high in fat, salt and sugar was high, the strength of our results was nevertheless surprising. Retailer and marketer's food and drink promotional investments are clearly heavily skewed towards these products. As a consequence, our young people are not getting the cues they need to encourage them to make healthier choices."

High sugar foods dominated till based promotions - sweets, chocolate and [sugary drinks](#) accounted for 84 percent of all products picked up at the till area for purchase. Offers also featured highly in decisions to purchase - over half of respondents made a purchase related to a price promotion. Just over a third of purchases in this group included sugar sweetened soft drinks, chocolate or sugar based confectionery.

Cairns summarised her recommendations saying: "It's clear that marketing is affecting the purchasing behaviour of young people. The majority of young people are aware of the food and drink marketing that surrounds them in their daily life and there is an opportunity for

marketers to use this is a positive way.

"The extent of sweets, chocolate and sugary drinks being purchased at the till is concerning. Reducing the number or indeed completely eliminating these products from till areas could have a really positive impact on the buying behaviour and in turn the health of [young people](#).

"The research indicates that the most urgent priority is to take positive steps to reduce promotions for sugary food and drinks with reductions in [promotions](#) for high fat and salt products important targets also."

The Scottish Government has used the research to renew calls for junk [food](#) advertising to be banned before 9pm. Powers over broadcasting are reserved to the UK Government. The advertising is banned during children's programmes, but permitted during prime-time early evening shows, which are watched by large numbers of under 16s.

Provided by University of Stirling

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