Supermarkets exposing children to high calorific junk food at the checkout

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High calorific junk food exposed to children.

(Medical Xpress)—Convenience supermarkets are exposing children to high calorie, unhealthy junk food at the checkout area according to new research from the University of Sheffield.

In the first study of its kind researchers from the University's School of Health and Related Research (ScHARR) found that 90 per cent of food products on display at the checkouts were defined as 'very unhealthy' by the Food Standards Agency and packed with high amounts of fat, sugar and salt.

The research published in the *Journal of Public Health* Nutrition was

designed and carried out by University of Sheffield medical students. Data collected at inner-city convenience stores from the three leading supermarket chains; Tesco, Sainsbury's and Asda, found that the main healthy product on display was sugar-free chewing gum.

The data was collected in March 2012, a year after the Government signed a "Responsibility Deal" with members of the supermarket industry, in which the supermarkets pledged to "encourage and enable people to adopt a healthier diet".

Over the last 20 years childhood obesity rates have risen dramatically in the UK - a result of the consumption of high calorie and unhealthy foods and the lack of exercise.

The World Health Organisation has concluded that heavy marketing of processed energy dense foodstuffs to children is a 'probable' causal factor for childhood obesity.

Childhood obesity is associated with an increased risk of obesity in adulthood which in turn leads to a risk of type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease and many forms of cancer.

Research has shown that the number of attempts children pester their parents to influence their purchasing decisions peaks in the three to five year age group.

Dr Jason Horsley, Lecturer from ScHARR, said: "The checkout is an area which all shoppers must pass through, so displays of highly desirable calorie-dense foodstuffs are an unavoidable exposure. "

"Children are a significant market for retailers of processed foodstuffs and budgets dedicated to advertising to children have grown exponentially in the last three decades. Youngsters are often naïve to

sophisticated marketing techniques and they influence parents' purchases through pester power."

All three supermarket chains surveyed in the study signed up to the responsibility deal pledge in March 2011 to 'support and enable our customers to eat and drink fewer calories through actions such as product/ menu reformulation, reviewing portion sizes education and information, and actions to shift the marketing mix towards lower calorie options.

Provided by University of Sheffield

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