Availability of HFSS items in food shops in the communities first area of central Rhyl; What is on offer at checkouts and promotional area and how does it compare with healthy eating guidelines?

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Background

In wales around 23% of adults are obese, with the greatest obesity rates in the most deprived areas (Welsh government, 2017). Snack foods may be in part to blame for the increase in obesity rates. Previously checkouts in food shops have been found to contain a high number of high fat, salt and sugar (HFSS) snacks and a limited number of healthy snacks (Sustain, 2012). Fruit and vegetable consumption is also reported to be lower in low socioeconomic areas, with the lowers consumption in wales being in the north wales area (Welsh government, 2017). This lack of fruit and vegetables could also contribute to the higher obesity rates in low socioeconomic areas. The aims of this study are to assess if choosing healthy snacks is possible at checkouts and to identify if enough variety of fruit and vegetables are on offer in in-town shops to meet the 5-a-day recommendation.

Methods

The study is a cross-sectional audit, with data collected though observations. It took place in the Rhyl West 2 area (RW2A) in north Wales, which is ranked the second most deprive area in Wales (Welsh Government, 2015).

Results

The majority of shops had HFSS snacks available with just over half offering healthy options. All shops had snack foods on at least some of their checkouts. 78% of checkouts contained snack foods, of these 48% contained healthy snacks foods and 58% contained HFSS snacks. Showing there was a greater availability of HFSS snacks on checkouts. Where healthy snacks were available they were often available at lower cost than HFSS snacks.

![Graph 1 showing the average number of healthy versus less healthy items available on each checkout per shop](image)

Graph 1 shows six of the seven shops contain a higher average number of, HFSS snacks per checkout than healthy snacks and only one of seven shops containing a higher number of healthy snacks per checkout. It also shows healthy snacks were more available in the supermarkets than in-town shops.

Key:

- Supermarkets
  - DS1 = Discount supermarket 1
  - SM1 = Supermarket 1
  - SM2 = Supermarket 2
- In-town shops
  - FF2 = Frozen retailer
  - DR1 = Discount retailer 1
  - DR2 = Discount retailer 2
  - FF1 = frozen retailer 1

All in-town shops visited stocked fruit and vegetables in some form. Graph 2 shows the greatest variety of fruit or vegetables was fresh fruit with 33 options available divided between three of the shops, however this fruit often appeared low in quality due to poor display and storage. Graph 2 also shows in every category except dried fruit FF1 had equivalent or more varieties of fruit or vegetables on offer. DR2 had the least variety of fruit or vegetables however still offered nine varieties.

![Graph 2 showing the different types of fruit and vegetables available in the RW2A](image)

Discussion and Conclusion

Similarly, to Sustain in 2012, the majority of the checkouts contain more HFSS snacks than healthy snacks although a lower percentage of checkouts contained HFSS snacks than in Sustain (2012). In contrast to sustain (2012), all three supermarkets had healthy snack options at some checkouts. This is encouraging as it increases the likelihood these items will be selected. This may be beneficial for weight management as a high intake of healthy snacks has been show to be related to a reduced waist circumference (O'Connor et al, 2015).

Although north Wales is reported to have a low fruit and vegetables consumption, all in-town shops had fruit and vegetables available. This supports Millichamp et al (2013) reporting good availability in low socioeconomic areas. Suggesting consumption is not based solely on availability. In the shop offering the least variety of fruit and vegetables purchasing five different fruits or vegetables is still possible, although choice would be limited.

In conclusion, it would be possible to make change-4-life snack swaps at supermarket checkouts however not at the in-town shop checkouts. It would also be possible to meet the 5-a-day recommendations if shopping just in the in-town shops however the variety and quality available may be reduced compared to a supermarket. options.

References


