

# NUTRITION & HEALTH

April 12-14, 2018 | Amsterdam, Netherlands

## Parents' perceptions of the effect of food advertising on children's food choices and weight status

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**Background:** Advertising directed to children has received regular focus for many years as it is fraught with ethical concerns, while, children are a vulnerable group that should be protected rather than being the object for companies' marketing. Recent concerns about the increased rates of obesity among children worldwide have resulted in the resurgence of interest towards food advertising targeting children. Since parents play an important mediation role in controlling their children, thus, it is important to understand parents' perceptions. Limited research exists on the parents' perceptions toward the effects of food advertising on children, but to the researcher's knowledge, no research has yet been done in the Middle East including Qatar targeting this issue.

**Objective:** The aims of this study were to examine: parents' perceptions toward the effect of food advertising; the effect of advertising and other associated factors on childhood obesity and children's eating patterns; regular eating habits of children and the mostly consumed products consumed by children in Qatar, and the prevalence of overweight and obesity among parents and their children.

**Methodology:** A cross-sectional study was conducted among 332 parents of children aged between 4 and 14 years at shopping mall and public parks in Doha, the state of Qatar. A survey was carried out to measure parent's perceptions toward the effect of food advertising directed to children. Anthropometric measurements were self-reported except for parents' weight which was obtained via an electronic scale. SPSS program version 21 was used for analysis and p-value  $\leq 0.05$  indicated statistical significance.

**Results:** The findings demonstrated that more than 50% of participated parents and their children were either overweight or obese. The majority of parents expressed negative perceptions of food advertising targeting children and preferred to better regulations of this area ranging from modification of advertising contents to its total prohibition (63%). However, their perceptions were significantly affected by age, education level, and marital status ( $p < 0.05$ ). Moreover, children's eating habits and weight status were significantly associated with parents' knowledge, screen time, and the intended advertising messages ( $p < 0.05$ ).

**Conclusion:** These findings confirm previous data indicating that exposure to food advertising can increase the desire to consumed advertised products. This research generally confirms the need for better legislative regulations of this issue in the state of Qatar and larger contribution of food products that have positive implications on children's health in the future.

### Biography

Lubna A G Mahmood is a Pediatric Metabolic Dietitian. She has an honor bachelor degree in Human Nutrition followed by a post graduate diploma in clinical research from USA and a Master's degree in Nutrition from UK. She is a certified researcher by NIH (US). Previously, she served as a Research Assistant at Harvard University. She is an Editor for international journals and author for various published researches.

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