

How to tackle obesity inequalities in Lewisham: insights from how families living in low-income areas engage with the food environment

Anna Isaacs, Kimberley Neve, Joel Halligan, Corinna Hawkes
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SUMMARY

Obesity and poor-quality diets disproportionately affect low-income communities in the UK. A key question is therefore: **HOW CAN POLICY THAT AIMS TO IMPROVE DIETS BE MORE EFFECTIVE IN LOW-INCOME COMMUNITIES?**

The Centre for Food Policy sought to provide insights into that question. Between 2017 and 2019, we conducted research with parents of school- and nursery- aged children in three low-income parts of England that experience higher than average rates of childhood obesity in Great Yarmouth, Stoke-on-Trent, and the London Borough of Lewisham. Through these three case studies, we generated a body of evidence on how with their food environments



Financial insecurity influenced purchasing and eating practices in myriad ways to make it difficult for parents to provide healthy food for their children.

Shopping at markets and independent stores was very common in Lewisham—they were seen as cheaper, and they stocked more **ethnically diverse products** that were unavailable in the main supermarkets.

Families in Lewisham were overall very positive about their local food environment, mainly due to the close proximity of the nearest low-cost supermarket or fresh food market, but also because it **offered an alternative to expensive family activities** that the participants wanted to do with their children, but were unable to afford.

Snacking on HFSS foods was very common in all areas and particularly in families where children had more independence.

The food environment fulfils many **social and emotional needs** that go beyond sustenance. These include: spaces for people to socialise; the provision of affordable pleasures; the opportunity to try new products in the context of mundane food routines; respite from often overwhelming lives; and opportunities to please and placate children.

Marketing and supermarket deals influence the purchase of specific brands and products. Most participants were well **aware of this manipulation**, whilst also

People used **deals and price reductions** on unhealthy foods as an opportunity to



