

Do Socioeconomic Factors Influence Supermarket Content and Shoppers' Purchases?

Maria Gomez, Natalie Vinkeles Melchers, Ruth Colagiuri

Background

- There is a wealth of evidence that individuals who are socially disadvantaged are at increased risk of having unhealthy diets
- Relatively little research on supermarket food purchasing habits of people from lower vs higher SES groups
- Most research on food purchasing used self-report and recall

Aims



- Compare the proportion of healthy vs unhealthy foods in high vs low SES supermarkets
- Determine if any differences are reflected in shoppers' purchases

Methodology



Study Design

- Cross-sectional study conducted in metropolitan Sydney in 2008

Definition of unhealthy food

- We selected four specific types of foods to use as indicators of unhealthy (non-core) food:
 - Confectionary
 - Sugar sweetened carbonated beverages
 - Sweet biscuits and cakes
 - Chips and popcorn

Methodology

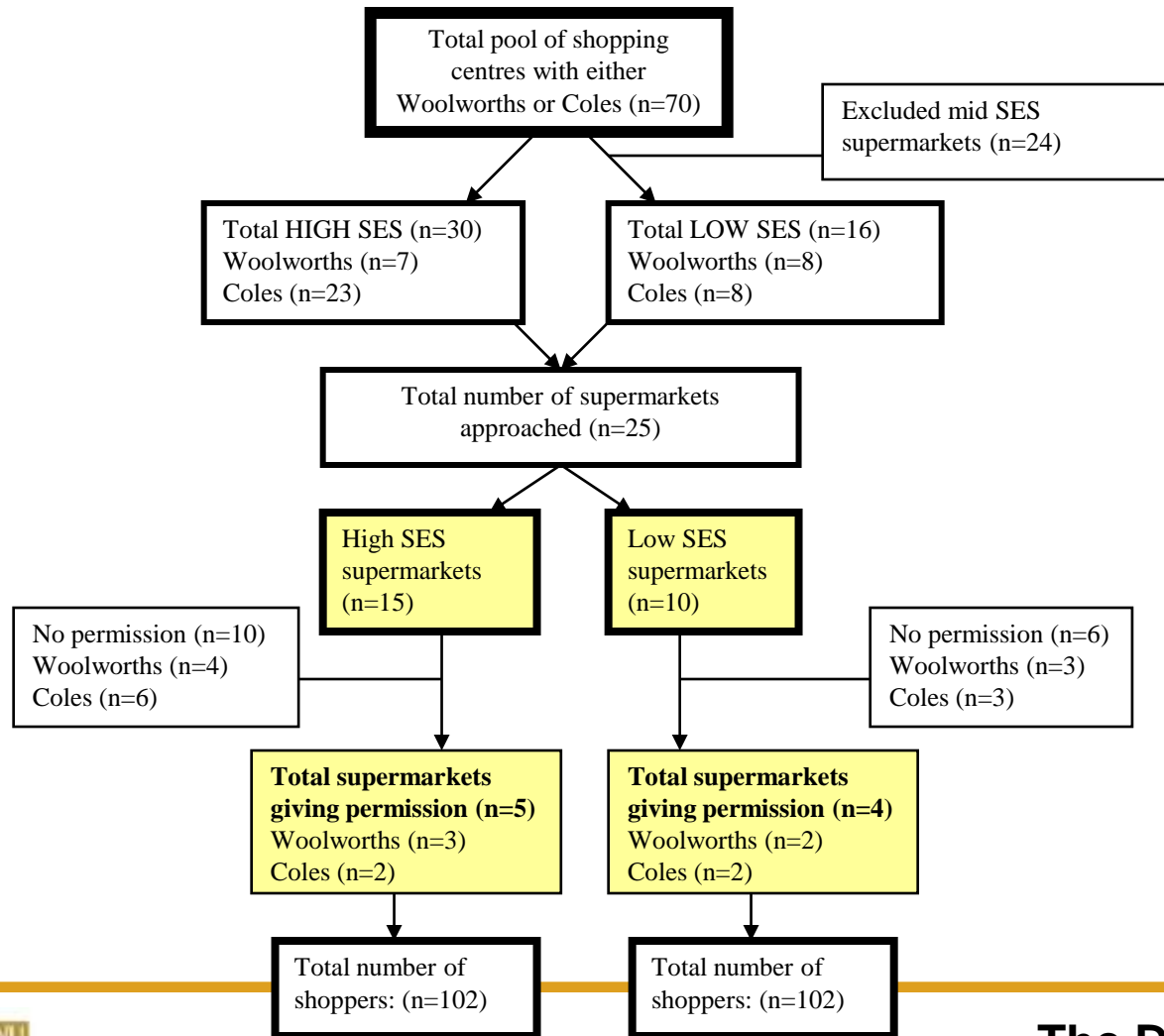


- We developed a system of “proportional units” to calculate the quantity of food products in each group
- The length of each supermarket aisle was measured and multiplied by the shelf height and number of aisles to calculate total shelf space

Identification of high and low SES areas

- Using the Socioeconomic Index for Areas (SEIFA) score we ranked all Sydney suburbs which had a shopping centre and grouped them into clusters of low and high socio-economic status

Methodology



Methodology



Participant and survey process

- Written consent to review shopping docket was obtained from each subject
- Dockets were either photographed or collected from shoppers
- Participants were asked how often they shopped per week as well as number of people being shopped for



What we found



Supermarket space allocated to non-core foods

- We estimated the proportion of supermarket shelf space dedicated to non-core foods in 9 supermarkets (5 in high and 4 in low SES areas) in metropolitan Sydney
- There was no difference in the shelf space dedicated to non-core foods between high and low SES areas

What we found

Purchase of non-core foods



Overall low SES shoppers purchased:

- significantly more of two of the four non-core foods studied than high SES shoppers (sugar sweetened carbonated beverages; chips)
- Non-significant trend towards more purchase of sweet biscuits and cakes; and confectionary by lower SES shoppers

What we found

- The average frequency of shopping per week tended to be slightly higher among shoppers in the lower SES areas, however this difference was not significant
- The mean number of people shopped for was significantly more for people shopping in the low compared with the high SES supermarkets
- However, this did not account for the higher purchase of non-core foods by people shopping in low SES supermarkets

Strengths



New Methodology

- Most research in this area relies on recall (Food Frequency Questionnaires & interviews)
- This study was based on an objective analysis of actual purchases through shoppers' dockets

Limitations

- Focus on supermarket shopping only as opposed to other outlets
- We only collected shopping docket from a single supermarket visit which may not have been representative of the shoppers' usual shopping pattern

Where to next



- Growing belief that it is possible for industry and public health to work in partnership to address current problems of health and sustainability
- Our exploratory work with the food and advertising industry indicates that it is sensitive to public pressure for social responsibility

What is needed?



- General strategies might include:
 - Industry guidelines for promoting core vs non-core foods
 - Consumer education by supermarkets to promote fruit & vegetable consumption
 - Removing confectionary displays adjacent to check-out counters

What we are doing



Preliminary work exploring possible reasons and drivers for supermarket shoppers from low SES areas purchasing more non-core foods

-re-analysing shoppers dockets to determine if there are any other differences, such as price or variety of non-core purchases that might provide further insight

- exploring drivers for the higher rates of purchase of non-core foods in low SES areas



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