

## Exploring the influence of local food environments on food behaviours: a systematic review of qualitative literature

Considerable changes in food and nutrition environments have created problems related to the access, availability and affordability of healthier options in some communities. The food environment can be framed around three categories: 1) community nutrition (types of stores, accessibility), 2) the consumer nutrition environment (choices within store) and 3) the organizational nutrition environment (home, school, work).

Existing numerical oriented research has not established a consistent evidence base looking at the relationship between the food environment and dietary behaviours. This review fills a research gap, being the first systematic review collecting non numerical data to explore the relationship between the local food environment and food and purchasing behaviours.

After review 30 studies were selected against specific criteria, the findings were reported under four themes:

- 1) *The community nutrition environment*: overall, availability, accessibility and affordability were consistently identified as key reasons for store choice and purchasing decisions, often resulting in less healthy food choices in the community nutrition environment
- 2) *The consumer nutrition environment (in store)*: food availability and quality in stores and food store characteristics within consumer nutrition environments also influenced purchasing decisions.
- 3) *Other environmental factors*: media and advertising were strong environmental factors influencing purchasing decisions.
- 4) *Individual coping strategies for shopping and purchasing decisions*: within the context of financial restraints people used a range of coping strategies within the community and consumer environments

The collection of non-numerical data has emphasised the complex and diverse factors influencing the relationship between the food environment and food purchasing decisions. These findings can be used to guide policy and further food environment research.

Reference: Pitt E, Gallegos D, Comans T, Cameron C, Thornton L. Exploring the influence of local food environments on food behaviours: A systematic review of qualitative literature. *Public Health Nutrition*. 2017;20(13):2393-2405. [doi:10.1017/S1368980017001069](https://doi.org/10.1017/S1368980017001069)