

Factors influencing dietary behaviours in urban food environments in Africa: a systematic mapping review

Many countries in South Africa have 'a double burden of disease', where nutrition related non-communicable diseases exist alongside communicable diseases. Diets high in processed, energy dense food, animal source foods, sugar and fats have increased, whereas quantities of dietary fibre and complex carbohydrates (such as wholegrains, fruits and vegetables) have decreased. There has been a rise in obesity prevalence for men, women and children. The prevalence of children living with overweight and obesity in Africa is expected to increase from 8.5% (2010) to 12.7% by 2020. Previous research focused on adult women (aged 18-70), as the prevalence of obesity in this age and gender was higher. However, now there are indications that obesity is spread more widely through the entire population. This review aims to map the dietary behaviours of adults and adolescents of both genders in urban food environments, identifying areas for future research.

Following a selection criteria, 27 studies were reviewed. Factors affecting dietary behaviour were categorised and were allocated to four broad categories: i) individual, ii) social environment, iii) physical environment and iv) wider environment (eg. food marketing and media). The majority of dietary behaviours identified were at an individual level (45/77). Factors in the social (11/77), physical environment (12/77) and wider environment (9/77) were less investigated. Individual factors included mental cognition, lifestyle, biological and demographic. Low self-esteem, high levels of stress, and lack of time were associated with unhealthy eating behaviour. Family and friends had a significant influence on dietary behaviour in the social environment. Convenience and availability are the most significant factors in the physical environment. Nine factors emerged related to dietary behaviour in the wider environment, societal and cultural values were significant. None of the studies specifically reviewed men, although mixed gender studies showed that factors associated with dietary behaviour across the different environments were similar. There was also great variability in how studies were carried out, making collective assessment of their findings difficult.

Overall, the authors conclude there is a significant gap in research related to food environments in urban Africa, urging for additional research in this field to be conducted. There is also a need for a more robust research design to improve the quality of evidence for policy making.

Osei-Kwasi H, Mohindra A, Booth A, et al. Factors influencing dietary behaviours in urban food environments in Africa: A systematic mapping review. *Public Health Nutrition*. 2020;23(14):2584-2601. [doi:10.1017/S1368980019005305](https://doi.org/10.1017/S1368980019005305)