The food environment in Latin America: a systematic review with a focus on environments relevant to obesity and related chronic diseases

This systematic review investigates the contribution of food environments to the rapid increase in the prevalence of obesity occurring in most Latin American countries. Literature from Latin America which describes the food environment and policies which target food environment has been reviewed. It also assesses the analytic studies which investigates the associations between food environments and dietary behaviours, overweight and obesity and consequent obesity related diseases. Six dimensions of the food environment are explored including “food retail provision, labelling, marketing, price and composition.”

Studies have been from Brazil, Mexico, and Guatemala. There were consistent associations between availability of fruit and vegetable markets and higher consumption of fruit and vegetables. Health claims in food packaging were prevalent and mostly misleading. There was a widespread use of marketing strategies for unhealthy food for children. The study also found that fresh food cost more than processed foods.

The study concluded that there were many gaps in the knowledge regarding food and nutritional policies in Latin America. There was also a scarcity in longitudinal food retail studies, and the impact of food prices on diet and effects of digital marketing on health and diet.