
Do Socioeconomic Factors Influence Supermarket Content and Shoppers' Purchases?

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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

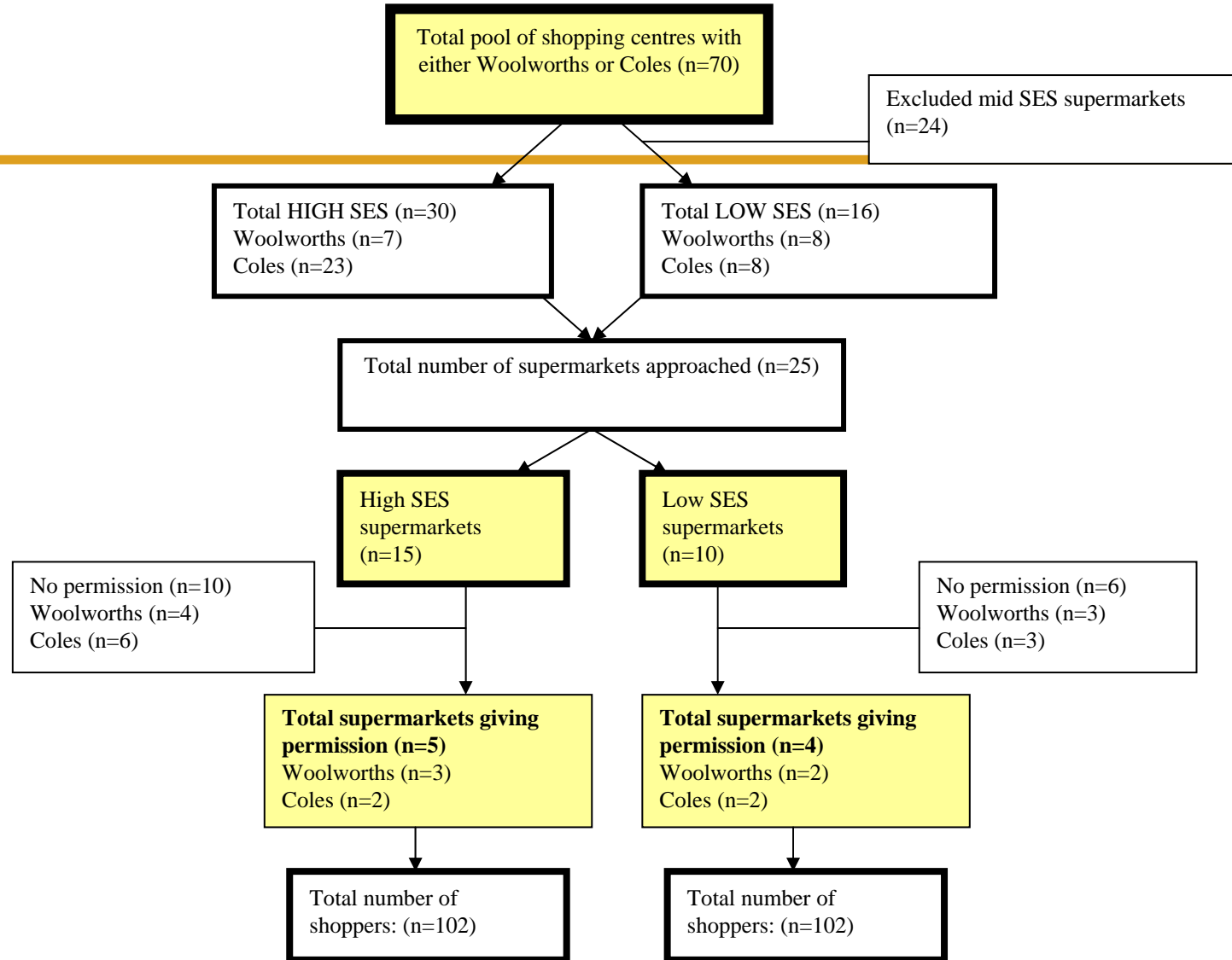


- Compare the proportion of healthy vs unhealthy foods in high vs low SES supermarkets
- Determine if any differences are reflected in shoppers' purchases

Methodology



- Cross-sectional study conducted in metropolitan Sydney in 2008
- We selected four foods to use as indicators of unhealthy (non-core) food:
 - Confectionary
 - Sugar sweetened carbonated beverages
 - Sweet biscuits and cakes
 - Chips and popcorn



Methodology



- The length of each supermarket aisle was measured and multiplied by the shelf height and number of aisles to calculate total shelf space
- We developed a system of “proportional units” to calculate and compare the quantity of food products in each group
- Data were collected from the shopping docket of 204 shoppers visiting the 9 supermarkets, ie, 102 shoppers each from supermarkets in high and low SES areas.

What we found



Supermarket space allocated to non-core foods

- We found no difference in the proportion of shelf space dedicated to non-core foods in the 9 supermarkets

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 was slightly higher among shoppers in the lower SES areas, but was not significant
- The mean number of people shopped for was significantly higher 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 low SES shoppers

Subsequent Inquiry

Subsequent Inquiry

Quantitative analysis



COLGATE MY FIRST TOO 1PACK	4.99	verage?
COLGATE MAXFRESH TOO 180GRAM	3.49	.....
COLGATE PASTE TOOTHP 45GRAM	4.99	.....
KARNOTTS LEMON CRISPS 250GRAM	1.55	.....
WESTERN STAR BUTTER 250GRAM	2.53	.....
BANANAS PERKG	2.40	.....
1.917 kg NETT @ \$1.48/kg	2.84	verage? ..
FIELD GROWN TOMATOES PERKG	4.05	.....
1.632 kg NETT @ \$2.48/kg		.....
KRAFT DAIRY BITES CH 72GRAM	2.19	.....
XCADBURY BRUNCH BAR 180GRAM	4.46	.....
S B COLES BREAD WHIT 650GRAM	2.18	verage? ..
Quantity: 2 @ \$1.09 each		?
F & V CARROTS PERKG	1.41	.....
0.842 kg NETT @ \$1.68/kg		.....
MANDARINS IMPERIAL PERKG	4.18	.....
2.112 kg NETT @ \$1.98/kg		.....
ROCKMELON 1EAACH	2.96	verage? ..
Quantity: 2 @ \$1.48 each		?
LIPTON YELW T/BAGS C 100PACK	5.19	.....

- The shopping docket were re- analysed for differences in price between the high and low SES supermarkets for the non-core food categories.
- The results showed that there were no differences in the amount spent per unit for any of the food categories we analysed.
- This means that price differences (if any) between low and high SES supermarkets is unlikely to be the driver for the increased purchase of chips and fizzy drinks in low SES supermarkets.

Subsequent Inquiry

Quantitative analysis

- Literature review -
 - i) status of evidence about supermarket shopping and low SES
 - ii) the reasons put forward to explain higher consumption of less healthy foods among people of low SES.



Subsequent Inquiry

Qualitative analysis

Focus Groups –

- i) key opinion leaders (from industry, public health and social research)
- ii) Multicultural health workers from lower SES areas

Key reasons:

- food choices are a low priority when there is considerable disorder in peoples' lives because of other pressures
- non-core food is often a cheap food item
- fizzy drinks, confectionary and chips are often sale items which also encourages poor impulsive food choices



Policy Implications

- No “one size fits all” solution
- For Government
 - Food labelling eg. Traffic light system
- For food retail industry
 - Food retail industry guidelines for promoting core vs non-core foods
 - Consumer education by supermarkets to promote fruit & vegetable consumption eg. how to use healthy food.
 - Removing confectionary displays adjacent to check-out counters



Acknowledgement

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Reference:

Vinkeles Melchers N, Gomez M, Colagiuri R. (2009) Do Socioeconomic Factors Influence Supermarket Content and Shoppers' Purchases? The Health Promotion Journal of Australia. 20(3):241-246

<http://www.menzieshealthpolicy.edu.au/>