

ASSESSMENT AND RESEARCH ON CHILD FEEDING (ARCH) PROJECT BRIEF

Research Finds Consumption and Promotion of Commercially-Produced Complementary Foods was Less Pervasive in Urban Cambodia, Nepal, Senegal, and Tanzania Than That of Commercially-Produced Snack Foods

SUMMARY:

This brief presents findings from Helen Keller International's Assessment and Research on Child Feeding Project (ARCH). ARCH is conducting research on the promotion of commercially-produced foods commonly fed to children aged 6-23 months and encouraging use of these findings for decision-making in policies and programs to improve the nutrition of infants and young children.

This ARCH study assessed consumption of commercially-produced food products among infants and young children and their mothers' exposure to promotions for these products in the most populous cities of Cambodia, Nepal, Senegal, and Tanzania (Phnom Penh, Kathmandu Valley, Dakar Department, and Dar es Salaam).

In all countries, we found a higher rate of consumption of commercially-produced snack foods than of commercially-produced complementary foods. Rates of promotion of snack foods were also much higher than for complementary foods.

SIGNIFICANCE:

Commercially-produced complementary foods could be nutritionally beneficial for young children if fortified and of optimal nutrient composition. Nutrient-poor commercially-produced snack foods, however, may be detrimental to young child feeding by displacing consumption of other nutritious foods. In addition, overconsumption of such foods, which are also often high in sugar and salt, can contribute to malnutrition, as well as adult obesity and non-communicable diseases.

STUDY DESIGN:

This cross-sectional, health facility-based survey was conducted in 2013-2014. Structured interviews with mothers of children less than 24 months of age (280+ in each location) assessed mothers' exposure to commercial promotion for and children's consumption of breast-milk substitutes, commercially-produced complementary foods, and commercially-produced snack food products. Mothers were asked to report dietary intake of their youngest child on the day prior to interview and the consumption frequency of commercially-produced snack food products.

STUDY FINDINGS:

Cambodia:

Context: Forty percent of children under five years of age are stunted (NIS, 2011). Only 24.0% of urban Cambodian children 6-23 months of age are fed in accordance with WHO recommended infant and young child feeding (IYCF) practices. Nearly a third (32.0%) of urban Cambodian children 6-23 months of age consume sugary snack foods (DHS, 2015).

Findings:

Consumption: Only 12 (5.4%) children 6-23 months of age had consumed a commercially-produced complementary food on the day prior to the interview. Consumption of commercially-produced snack food products was much more common among children 6-23 months of age in Phnom Penh. Of children 6-23 months of age, over half (55.0%) consumed a commercially produced snack food product on the prior day.

Promotion: Almost all mothers (97.3%) observed a promotion for a commercially produced snack food product since the birth of their youngest child, while under a third (31.1%) reported observation of a promotion for a commercially-produced complementary food.

Nepal:

Context: Despite improvements in the nutritional status of children in Nepal over the last 15 years, 41.0% of Nepalese children under five years of age are stunted (MOHP, 2012). Only 37.0% of urban Nepalese children 6-23 months of age are fed in accordance with WHO recommended IYCF practices. 61.0% of urban Nepalese children 6-23 months of age consume sugary snack foods (MOHP, 2012).

Findings:

Consumption: Approximately one-fourth (24.6%) of children 6-23 months age had consumed a commercially-produced complementary food in the prior day. By contrast, consumption of commercially-produced snack foods was 74.1% among children 6-23 months on the day prior to the interview.

Promotion: 20.2% of mothers reported seeing promotions for commercially-produced complementary foods since the birth of their youngest child. Promotions for commercially-produced snack foods were highly prevalent in Kathmandu Valley, reported by 83.8% of mothers.

STUDY FINDINGS, CONTINUED:

Senegal:

Context: Nineteen percent of Senegalese children less than five years of age are stunted (ANSD, 2014). Only 33.0% of Senegalese children less than six months of age are exclusively breastfed (a decline from 39.0% in 2011). Only 8% of children between 6-23 months of age met the minimum standard for three infant and young child feeding indicators (adequate feeding frequency, minimum dietary diversity, and consumption of breast milk/other milks)(ANSD, 2014).

Findings:

Consumption: Half (49.1%) of children aged 6-23 months of age had consumed a commercially-produced complementary food the prior day. Of children 6-23 months of age, over half (58.7%) consumed a commercially-produced snack food product on the prior day.

Promotion:

Thirty-nine percent of mothers reported promotions for commercially-produced complementary foods. Promotions for commercially-produced snack foods were highly prevalent, reported by 95% of mothers.

Tanzania:

Context: Tanzania has a high rate of stunting among children below 5 years of age (42.0%). Rates of exclusive breastfeeding are low (49.8%), and feeding in accordance with recommended WHO IYCF standards is also low (21.3%). According to the most recent DHS, nearly a quarter of children (23.0%) of children aged 6-23 months of age consume sugary snack foods (TDHS, 2010).

Findings:

Consumption: Consumption of commercially-produced complementary foods was rare, with only 3.1% of mothers reporting their child aged 6-23 months consumed a commercially-produced infant cereal the day before the interview. By contrast, just under one-fourth (23.1%) had consumed a commercially-produced snack food product on the prior day.

Promotion: Few mothers (0.9%) reported promotions for commercially-produced complementary food. But promotions for commercially-produced snack foods were widespread, reported by nearly half (49.3%) of mothers.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Governments should promote nutritious snack options during the complementary feeding period and discourage consumption of commercially-produced snack foods high in sugar and salt and low in nutrients.
- Nutrition interventions should address overconsumption of snack foods high in sugar and salt, and encourage healthier, low-cost, convenient snack food options.
- To improve diets during the complementary feeding period, we recommend countries develop national standards for all commercially-produced complementary food products, including quality control and standards for nutritive value.
- Governments need to identify and implement policy and regulatory actions to limit promotion of commercially-produced snack foods.
- We recommend research to further explore the relationship between commercially-produced snack food consumption and infant and young child nutrition.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

The data cited in this brief will be further elaborated in a forthcoming supplement on infant and child feeding in the journal, *Maternal and Child Nutrition*. The ARCH project and this supplement are funded through support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.