

In this issue

Parents as teachers

In this issue a number of papers highlight the importance of parents in determining the nutritional health of their children.

Gupta *et al.*¹ report on a cross-sectional study of 374 children in Senegal, concerned with early introduction of water and complementary foods and nutritional status. Ag Ayoya *et al.*² assess vitamin A supplementation coverage of children in Mali. The authors find that the possession and use of radios by parents, and the education level of fathers, are significant determinants.

Two papers suggest that parents should be priority targets for public health nutrition interventions for the benefit of children.

Stenhammer *et al.*³ report on a cross-sectional study of parents of 6-year-old children in Sweden to examine the effect of parents' educational background on children's dietary attitudes and practices. A key factor is parents' educational level. Arcan *et al.*⁴ demonstrate further the role of parents as mediators of children's dietary behaviour as they progress to adolescence. In their longitudinal study of 509 parent and adolescent pairs in the USA, they show that parents' dietary habits, and the home food environment during adolescence, influence their children's dietary habits in later life.

Advertisers as misleaders

Two papers from Australia suggest a battle for the hearts, minds and bellies of the eating public in which government food guidance systems are opposed by the food and drink industry and its marketing systems.

Russell and Worsley⁵ report on a cross-sectional study of 371 parents of children aged 2–5 years to explore how children's reported food preferences relate to dietary recommendations. Kelly *et al.*⁶ report on a study of television food advertising to children which highlights the high level exposure of Australian children to food marketing at odds with dietary guidelines. It is perhaps no surprise that Russell and Worsley find that children prefer highly energy-dense, sugary foods. Once again the case is made for legislation and regulation to protect our most vulnerable consumers.

Deficiencies in high-income countries

Iron and calcium nutrition remain live issues even in rich countries. Tao *et al.*⁷ quantify the potential effect of iron

defortification in the USA on iron-deficiency anaemia. Using computer simulations they predict that iron defortification will increase iron-deficiency anaemia among children and women of reproductive age.

In a prospective cohort study involving over 26 000 women and almost 8000 men, Key *et al.*⁸ observe a significant inverse association between estimated dietary calcium intake and fracture risk among women, but not men. They find that this association is stronger among younger women, and conclude that many women in the UK are at increased risk of fractures because their dietary calcium intakes are below 525 mg/day.

Roger Hughes
Deputy Editor

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