



**Obesity Action
Scotland**

Healthy weight for all

Promotions of Unhealthy Food in Scottish Retail Stores: What do Parents Say?

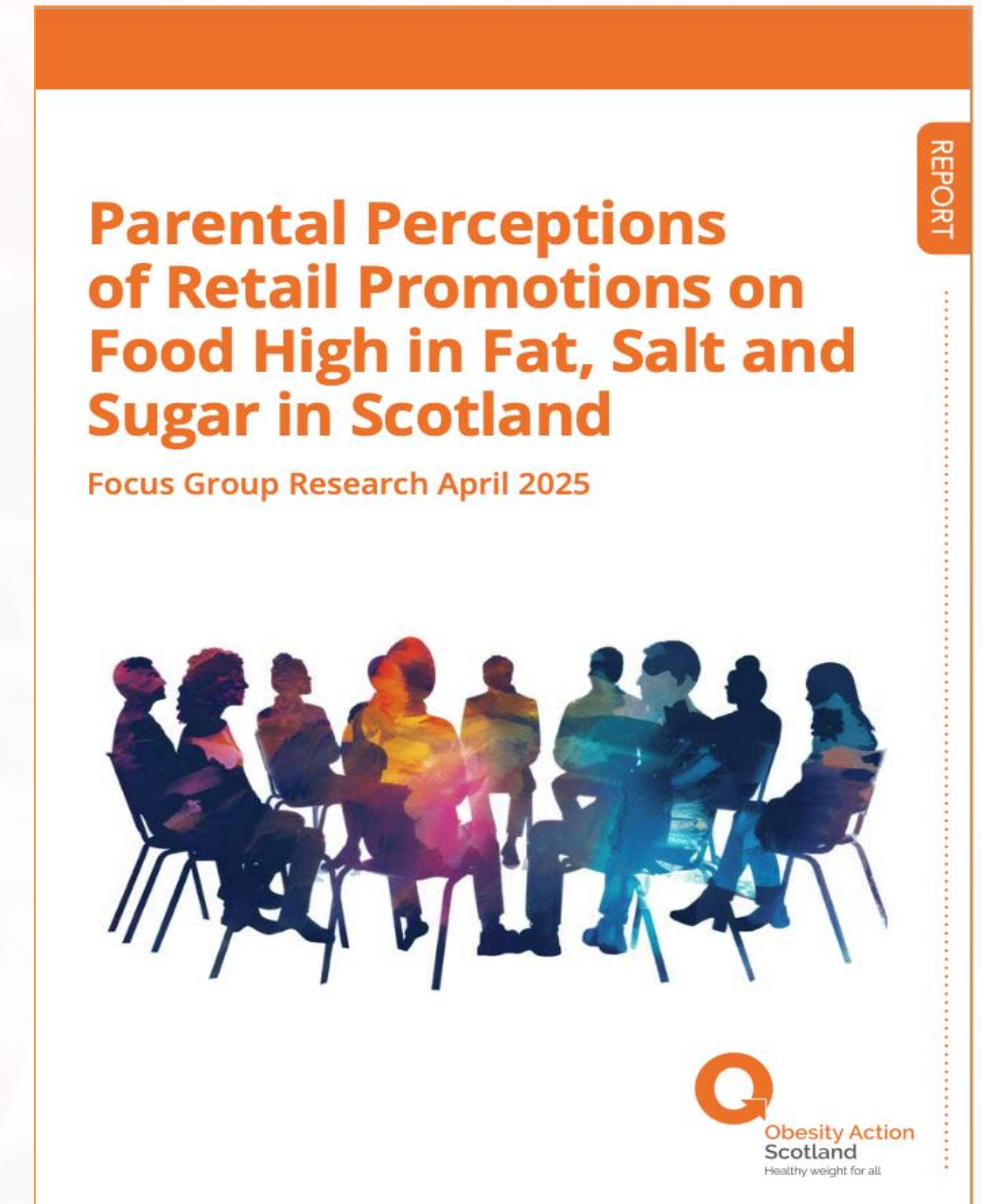
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Conference on 'Healthy Food Environment: Time to Deliver'

Focus Group Research

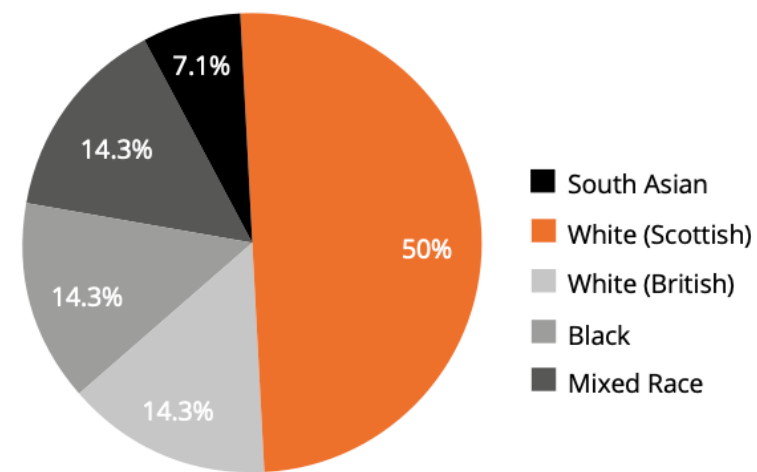
Focus group discussion with 18 parents of 4-16 year olds from different parts of Scotland in April.



Sample

- Two focus groups, each of 9 parents, one of single fathers in-person, another of mothers and fathers conducted online.
- 71% of reporting parents earned under £20000 annually.
- Only 35% worked full time and are educated above level 3.

Participant ethnic background



Results

Food Environment

- Dominated by supermarket chains.
- High cost of healthy food limits choices.
- Children's preferences driven by branding influence.

*“We had allotments and farms, [where] you could go get local produce that was cheap. But **now it's massive supermarkets that took away the local little bits.**” - Participant 1*

*“Your're payng for the brand. Like bottles of [sports drink brand]. Everyone wants to buy it because it's a thing... you have to buy your kid that **because you don't want them to be less popular.**” -Participant 6*

Price promotions

- Price promotions observed to be predominantly on unhealthy food.
- Food affordability – a key underlying factor in the response to price promotions.

Parents' expectations from food shopping - word cloud



Price promotion triggers for unhealthy food purchases – thematic mapping



*“There’s always promotions on that type a product, whether it’s fizzy drinks, whether it’s crisps, whether it’s chocolates, whether it’s pizzas and like ready made meals... **maybe t get people hooked on them.**”*

-Participant 9

“If you look at a lot of buy one get one free, they raise the price of that product by I don’t know, 30%, whatever. And then they give you a buy one get one free. So they’re always making profit all these half prices.” -

Participant 2

Multi-buys

- Most commonly cited promotion
- Perceived to stimulate compulsive buying
- Often leading to unplanned expenses

“I could go in and buy maybe an extra 10 items that I wasn’t planning on getting if I thought I was getting a good deal.”

– Participant 9

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- Participant 2

Temporary Price Reductions (TPRs)

- Some parents considered these a relief on their limited food budgets.
- Remarked these to rarely on healthy food.

“Obviously, if I see a yellow sticker and it’s down from 4 pounds to 25 pence, we’ve all seen these occasionally, these massive reductions, and we say OK, we’ll have it, it’s 25 pence.”

- Participant 17

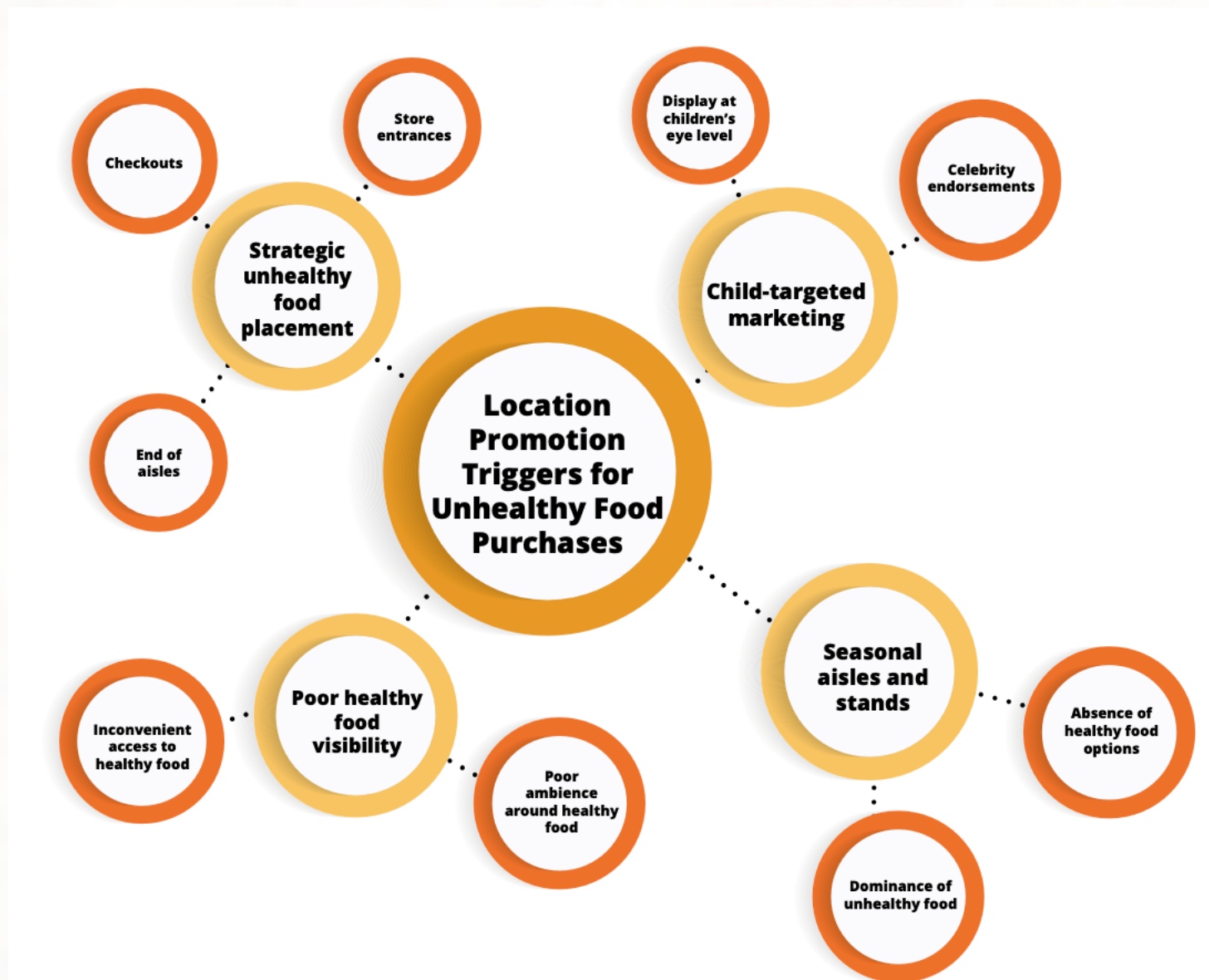
Placement-based promotions

- Store entrances, check-outs and aisle ends frequently cited to display unhealthy snacks
- Some parents reported it triggering compulsive buying
- Positioning was perceived by some to be deliberate to 'hook' consumers.

"I have to just, you know, buy because it just just there in front of me and I could just see it and it actually seems like it's calling to you."

- Participant 13

How placement-based promotions drive unhealthy food purchases



“Another part is [companies] using well known faces on all the products as well, you know, you can look at all the the sweet cereals and what it’s like [cartoon characters]...These are people that kids idolise and baiting them into wanting that product just for what’s on the packet.” - Participant 8

“There’s always promotions on that type a product, whether it’s fizzy drinks, whether it’s crisps, whether it’s chocolates, whether it’s pizzas and like ready made meals... maybe to get people hooked on them.”

-Participant 9

Child-targeted placements

- Products placed at children's eye level
- Promotions designed to capture children's attention
- Makes shopping with children difficult

“It puts a tremendous pressure on parents who don't have the money and these things are strategically there to get the parents say, OK, go on, we'll buy it for you.”
- Participant 17

Response sought

- Most thought government had a role in policy-making
- Bold and urgent action desired
- Policies to promote and incentivise healthier food and curb unhealthy food.

*“**Act now**, don’t wait 10 years or study data, consultations and the likes. There’s things that can be done now.”*

- Participant 2

Key Findings

Healthy food

Unaffordable, and therefore a driver for seeking unhealthy options on promotions

Impact of price promotions

Mostly on unhealthy food, influence impulse buying, builds brand loyalty, often leading to unhealthy food purchases and wasteful expenses.

Placement-based promotions

Supermarket layouts and promotion placements at check outs and aisles also encourage compulsive buying, with unhealthy food dominating the space.

Implications for inequalities

The perceived value of cost saving from promotions and the unplanned and often wasteful spendings attributed to them suggest disproportionate impact on low-income household budgets.

Policy suggestions

Most parents advocated for change to the retail environment, incentivising healthier choices through loyalty schemes, and implementing restrictions on unhealthy promotions.

Policy implications

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Ensure healthier food is affordable, available and promoted

Restrict unhealthy food and their promotions

Introduce mandatory targets for healthy food and their promotions

Inform families regarding healthy affordable meals

Resource supply of healthy food from levies on unhealthy food and drinks

Adopt coherent regulatory approach across health-harming products.



Thank you

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