

# THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PARENTS AND THEIR PRESCHOOL CHILDS EATING BEHAVIOURS AND BMI: A SECONDARY ANALYSIS OF THE NATIONAL PRESCHOOL NUTRITION SURVEY



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## BACKGROUND

To date, there have been several studies showing a relationship between parental eating behaviour and their children's eating behaviours. Parents play a powerful role in their children's eating behaviour, providing both genes and environment for children. They can influence children's developing preferences and eating behaviours as the gatekeepers of food for their children, and by acting as models of their own eating behaviour. Research also shows the relationship between having one or more overweight and obese parents has on the BMI of the child, this is a concerning matter due to the high rates of childhood obesity in Ireland and worldwide, with 20% of Irish children are overweight/obese by age 5.

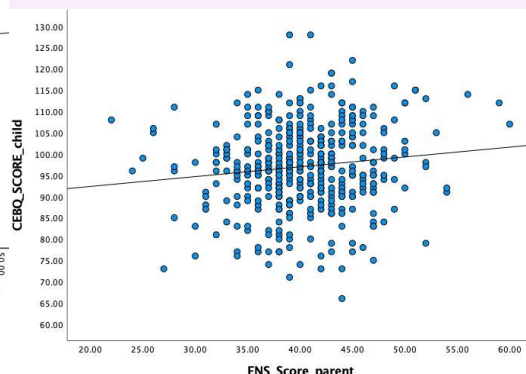
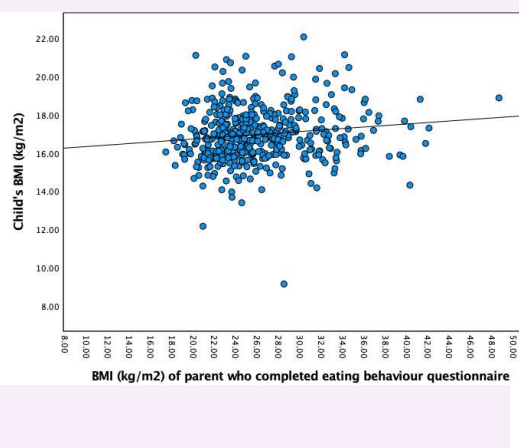
## AIMS

- To examine the relationship between parental eating behaviours with their children's eating behaviour and BMI.
- To determine the eating behaviours of parents and their children
- To examine the relationship between sociodemographic factors and eating behaviours in parents and their children
- To assess the relationship between parental eating behaviours and their children's eating behaviour

## METHODOLOGIES

- This study used data from the National Preschool Nutrition Survey (NPNS), which was a cross-sectional study, made up of 500 preschool participants aged 1-4 (*males 259, females 241*).
- Participants were randomly selected from childcare facilities and the website "EUMOM"
- The relationship between parental eating behaviour and their children's eating behaviour was assessed using the Children's Eating Behaviour Questionnaire (CEBQ) and the adult Food Neophobic Scale (FNS) alongside other data collected in the NPNS surveys.

## RESULTS



## STRENGTHS & LIMITATIONS

- There was a higher proportion of children of professional/managerial social class, with a low proportion of children from a skilled manual social class than the general Irish population. Over 82% of the sample coming from parents with a 3rd level education. These points should be considered in terms of the generalisability of the findings.
- Seasonal bias was avoided as the data was collected from October 2010 to September 2011.
- The parent FNS is an instrument that assesses neophobia, although it showed some reliability it is not a validated method for assessing eating behaviour.
- The CEBQ is a reliable measure that has been validated against behavioural measures of eating behaviour in the laboratory.

The child's CEBQ and parental FNS scores correlated ( $p=0.010$ )

There was no relationship between children's eating behaviours and their parent's SES level

A correlation between the BMI of the parent and BMI of their child was found ( $p=0.005$ )

There was a correlation between the child's food fussiness score and their age ( $p<0.001$ )

Child's food fussiness score correlated with the parent's education level ( $p=0.044$ )

Correlation occurred between the child's pro-intake score and the parent's neophilic score ( $p=0.047$ )

## CONCLUSION

Assessing eating behaviour in children is complicated due to its complex nature. A combination of assessment methods are necessary to understand all aspects of not only the child's behaviour and attitudes to food but also their parents. Understanding children's eating behaviour and the effect parents have on its development is crucial for the prevention of childhood obesity and the promotion of healthy eating habits during the early years of life.

When designing intervention programs it would be important to consider what parents consume as well as their influence in terms of what and how they feed their children. Further research, particularly through longitudinal studies to build on current research and address inconsistencies found in the literature.

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