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Research question: Is the presence of hot food takeaways (HFTs) within 800m of a secondary school associated with their use by pupils?

Background & Methods

Rates of childhood obesity continue to rise in the UK alongside growth of HFT and fast-food restaurant industries. In 2023, Sheffield City Council needed evidence on HFTs near schools and use by pupils to inform local planning policy. The medical students conducting this study purposively selected eight schools varying in deprivation and ethnicity. Google Maps was used to work out walking distance to the HFTs, and counts were made of numbers of pupils entering for a period of 30 mins. Correlation analysis was used to explore relationships between use of HFTs and distance from the school, and with measures of deprivation. Thematic analysis was used to identify key observations and issues.

Results

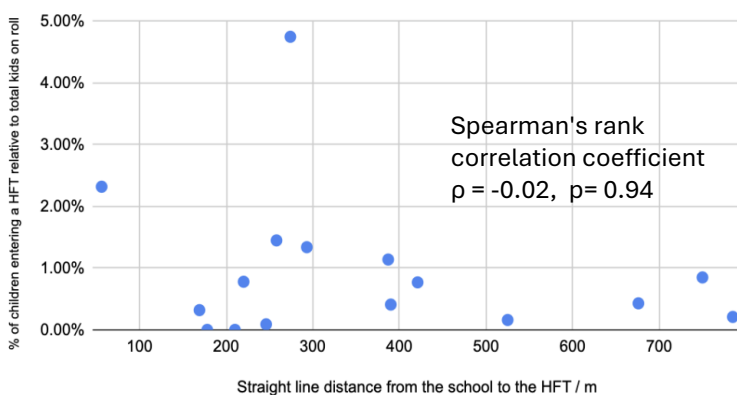
There was no significant relationship between distance from the school to the HFT and proportion of children who went to the HFTs (see *graph*)

Similarly, there was no significant relationship between free school meal eligibility (proxy for catchment area deprivation) in each school with the proportion of children who went to the HFTs ($\rho=0.1$; $p=0.82$).

Qualitative analysis revealed common themes

- Use by school children of convenience stores near schools (*see photo*);
- Groups of children entering HFTs but few children buying food (HFTs as social spaces)
- Children with parents entering HFTs (family behaviours)
- Types of food sold (food often deep fried)

Distance from the school to the HFT vs the % of children who went to the HFT



Convenience store between Fish Bar and Pizza Shop

Conclusion Neither distance from the school nor deprivation were associated with use of Hot Food Takeaways by Sheffield school pupils.

- The findings do not directly support a policy of restriction of Hot Food Takeaways near schools.
- Further studies are needed to investigate behaviours of pupils and their surrounding food environments, especially use of convenience stores.

Acknowledgements: With thanks to Hollie-mae Janes, Ian Baxter and Jessica Wilson (Sheffield City Council) for supporting this project and providing data on schools and hot food takeaways and to Caitlin Geddes, Joseph Parks, Areej Shahid and Cicely Gallagher for data collection and analysis.