Socio-demographic and lifestyle correlates of takeaway food consumption in UK adults

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Low-quality and nutrient-poor takeaway, take-out and fast foods have increased in popularity over the past 40 years and have been implicated as contributors to obesity and non-communicable disease\(^1\). There has been much debate regarding the determinants of takeaway food consumption, however, it is evident that the cause is multi-faceted with societal, environmental, socioeconomic, demographic, financial and behavioural factors being associated\(^2\). Thus, the aim of the present study was to investigate the relationship between takeaway food consumption and several socio-demographic and lifestyle variables simultaneously.

A cross-sectional observational study of 1724 adults (aged 18–64 years) was conducted from August 2016 – October 2017 in Merseyside, UK. Consumption of 212 habitual and takeaway foods was measured using a food frequency questionnaire and socio-demographic (including age, education level, ethnicity etc.) and lifestyle factors (physical activity, cigarette smoking and alcohol consumption etc.) were self-reported. All data were analysed using descriptive statistics; data was non-normal therefore, the relationship between takeaway food intake and socio-demographic and lifestyle factors was examined using Spearman’s rho.

The majority (46 %) of self-reported consumers consumed takeaway food 1–3 times per month. Nonetheless, over one third (37 %) consumed takeaway food at least once per week (10 % reporting consumption 2–4 times per week and 1 % consuming takeaway food 5 times per week or more). Having more children in the household, a physically active occupation, participating in moderate and vigorous physical activity, frequent smoking, increased alcohol consumption, poorer health status, and increased BMI were positively correlated with takeaway food consumption (P < 0\cdot005) (Table 1). Increased age and a higher education level were negatively correlated with takeaway food consumption (<0\cdot0005) (Table 1).

To conclude, the socio-demographic and lifestyle factors as shown above correlate to varying degrees with takeaway food consumption which agrees with previous research\(^3,4\). These findings could help inform policy and interventions to target the impacts of takeaway food on obesity and related non-communicable disease, by better understanding how takeaway food consumption links to other factors in adult lives.