



RESOURCE PACKAGE TO SUPPORT PARENTS IN REDUCING EXPOSURE TO FOOD ADS: OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS AND RELATIVE EFFECTIVENESS OF THREE COMPONENTS APRIL 2008

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2007, Young Media Australia (YMA), with funding from the Telstra Foundation, developed a resource package entitled *Healthy Viewing for Healthy Eating*, consisting of a DVD, a booklet, and a Parent Information Session. All parts of the package aim to motivate and encourage parents of under sevens to reduce their children's exposure to television food advertising. The DVD and the booklet are flexibly designed such that they can be used together as a single package, as separate stand alone components or in conjunction with the Parent Information Session. The session notes for the Parent Information session are designed to be used by professionals who work with groups of parents.

Three methods of supporting and delivering the resources to parents were trialled in three states, with the parents drawn from a range of populations:

- Parents were posted the short booklet (without the DVD).
- Parents were posted the *Healthy Viewing for Healthy Eating* DVD, accompanied by the same booklet (as above).
- Parents attended the Parent Information Session, following which the DVD and booklet were handed out to participants).

To analyse the effectiveness of the Resource Package overall, and its different components, a parent survey was conducted with parents of two to seven year olds both before, and approximately eight weeks after they received the resource(s). The surveys gathered data about the home media environment, parents' perceptions of the issues involving TV food advertising and how this affects their children. The same questions were asked in both questionnaires to enable a comparison of attitudes over the time that participants were in possession of the resource(s). The post-intervention questionnaire also asked for specific comments on the resources that were provided to them and their usefulness.

The findings (keeping in mind the small sample size) indicate that the resource(s) were effective in influencing some aspects of parents' attitudes and practices around their children's exposure to television food advertising. Of particular interest was a shift, most noticeably in the group of parents who were posted the DVD and accompanying booklet, from watching a majority of commercial TV on Saturday mornings, to watching videos and DVDs. This is of considerable significance, given the absence of ABC TV for kids on Saturday mornings, and the consequent greater exposure of children to food ads on commercial cartoon shows at this time.

Participants' views about some aspects of television food advertising also shifted (to a small degree, but in all cases by more than 10%) in a direction which suggests greater awareness of the amount of exposure to television food advertising and the potential influence it may have on their children. After using the resources, there was greater awareness that:

- food ads contribute to requests for unhealthy foods
- the use of characters from movies, TV programs or sporting heroes contribute to unhealthy food requests
- less exposure to television food advertising will make it easier to get their children to eat healthy foods.

Participants also indicated that they found it easier now to change their children's minds when they want unhealthy foods.

As expected, the most effective delivery method appears to be a combination of all three components, that is a Parent Information Session at which participants are given a copy of the DVD and booklet package. One hundred percent of participants who attended the Parent Information Session (a) watched the DVD, (b) read the booklet and (c) found both components to be useful or very useful. The majority of participants who received the DVD and booklet by post still regarded these components as useful or very useful, but the comparative percentages ranged between 71 and 88%. Forty percent of participants who attended the Parent Information Session stated they had changed the way they think or act as a result of the intervention, compared with 25% and 18% of those that received the DVD and / or booklet components by post.

The report concludes that while some aspects of the study are unclear due to the small sample size, there are indications that the resource has had a small but significant impact on parents' habits and views.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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YMA also thanks the following organisations and individuals for their assistance in the development, distribution and analysis of the survey: SA Children's Youth and Women's Health Service (CYWHS), Community Nutrition Unit, Tasmanian Department of Health and Human Services, the ABC Early Learning Centres, Parents' Jury, Kaye Mehta from Flinders University and Tim Kupke of University of South Australia.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. BACKGROUND

Research shows that frequent exposure to TV advertising can be influential in encouraging young children's preferences for fatty, salty, sugary and fast foods, and setting up risk factors for the development of obesity and overweight. In July 2006, Young Media Australia (YMA) received funding from the Telstra Foundation to extend the learnings from the community consultation of its 2005 *Through Thick or Thin* project. The project was entitled *Through Thick or Thin 2: strategies to reduce exposure to television food advertising*.

The main aim of *Through Thick or Thin 2* was to develop a resource which would inform parents about the problem with television food advertising and to motivate them to change their family's viewing environment. More specifically it encouraged parents to take charge of preschool children's TV choices at all times, keep TV sets in public spaces, choose non-commercial media, including ABC, Nickelodeon and videos / DVDs and discourage eating in front of TV. A five minute DVD with accompanying booklet with these messages was produced: *Healthy Viewing for Healthy Eating: a resource for parents of children under seven*.

Another part of the *Through Thick or Thin 2* project was to trial three different methods of delivering the resource to parents. Methods trialled were:

- Parents were posted the short booklet, without the DVD
- Parents were posted the *Healthy Viewing for Healthy Eating* DVD, accompanied by the same booklet as above
- Parents attended the Parent Information Session, following which the DVD and booklet were handed out to participants).

1.2. PARENT SURVEY

To analyse the effectiveness of the different methods of information delivery a parent survey was developed (see Appendix B) and was issued before and after the intervention was given. This was distributed to parents of two to seven year olds. The results of this survey are shown in the following sections of this report. This survey aimed to gather data regarding the home media environment. For example, how much TV was being watched by the child, which channels were being watched, who controlled what was being watched, and whether there was a TV in the child's bedroom. It also surveyed parents' perceptions of the issues involving TV food advertising and how this affects their children. These same questions were asked during a pre- and post-intervention questionnaire to see if any attitudes had changed over time or as a result of the intervention information. In addition, the

post-intervention questionnaire asked for specific comments on the resources that were provided to them and their usefulness.

2. METHODS

2.1. SURVEY DESIGN

The parent surveys were developed in consultation with a leading academic nutritionist at Flinders University. South Australia and Victoria had slightly different ethics approval requirements to Tasmania. This caused the information sheets and consent forms to be slightly different in each state (see Appendix A). However, the actual questions in survey forms of different states were identical (see Appendix B). The pre- and post-intervention surveys were very similar with a few added questions in the post-intervention survey regarding the resources they received and their usefulness (see Appendix B).

2.2. SAMPLING

The comparison of the resource delivery methods was conducted across three states: South Australia, Tasmania and Victoria. The organisations that sourced parents to participate in the trial were:

- South Australia. Child and Youth Health, Preschool health checks, Department of Children's, Youth and Women's Health Service
- Tasmania. Community Nutrition Unit, Department of Health and Human Services
- Victoria. ABC Developmental Learning Centres. (Although the preferred method of sourcing parents was through the Health sector in each state, difficulties were encountered in identifying such a group in Victoria. See full report for details.

The pre-intervention surveys were given to parents of under seven year old children, via the agencies listed above, during October and November 2007. A total of 92 survey pre-intervention survey forms were returned. The characteristics of those 92 participants are shown in section 2.3.

As part of the distribution of the initial survey, parents were asked if they were willing to participate in a trial of the resource, and further, if they would be willing to take part in an information session about the resource.

The three resources used for the intervention (information booklet, DVD, information session) were implemented on the survey participants during December 2007 in the following manner.

Group 1—parents were posted an information booklet only.

Group 2—parents were posted an information booklet and DVD.

Group 3—parents attended a Parent Information Session, and also received the information booklet and DVD.

These groups were organised initially by convenience. Firstly, those that were able to attend the Parent Information Session were automatically placed in group 3. Secondly, the remaining participants were randomly split evenly between Groups 1 and 2. A fourth group was created later, consisting of participants that returned their pre-intervention too late to be considered for an intervention. This became a self-created control group. A fifth group was created by those that did not include a contact address, hence they were unable to be contacted for participation in the intervention process.

The Parent Information Sessions were conducted during December 2007 at Café Enfield, one of seven Children’s Centres set up by the Department of Education in South Australia; and Friends of Child and Youth Health, a support group for mothers of 3–4 year olds in the south- western suburbs of Adelaide. All of these participants received a copy of the information booklet and DVD at the conclusion of the session.

A total of 82 post-intervention surveys were posted to participants during February 2008 (those in group 5 could not be contacted). By the time they received these surveys most participants would have had their resource (information booklet and possibly DVD) at home for approximately eight weeks. A total of 38 participants responded to the post-intervention survey by April 2008. This equates to a 46% response rate overall. The characteristics of these 38 participants are shown in section 2.4. The distributions of the intervention groups are shown in Table 2.1 below, along with the number of responses and the percentage response rate to the post-intervention survey for each intervention group.

Table 2.1. Distribution of the intervention groups

Intervention Group	No. participants	No. responses	% response rate
Group 1	33	17	47
Group 2	33	13	36
Group 3	11	5	42
Group 4	5	3	60
Group 5	10	N/A	N/A
Total	92	38	46

2.3. PRE-INTERVENTION PARTICIPANTS

Figure 2.1 below shows the percentage of pre-intervention responses from each state.

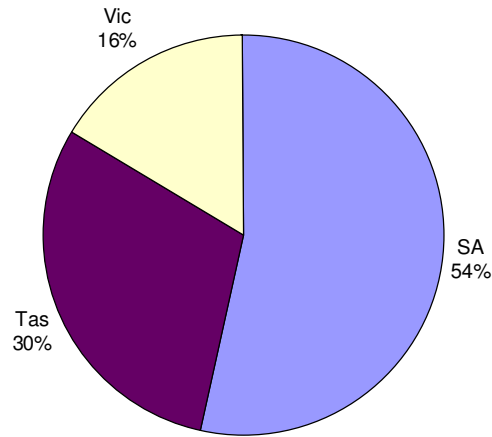


Figure 2.1. Distribution of pre-intervention survey responses from Australia's states

Figure 2.2 below shows the size of the families surveyed pre-intervention, according to how many children were in each family (No. of children). The percentage of families surveyed with each family size is shown (% Responses). The total number of children in all the families was 205. The average family surveyed had 2.2 (± 0.9) (mean (\pm standard deviation)) children.

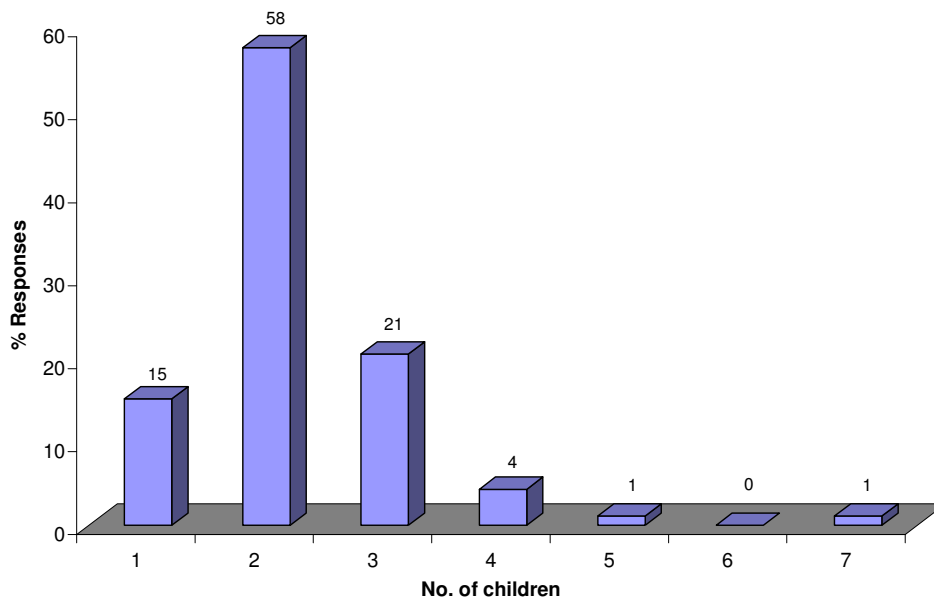


Figure 2.2. Distribution of pre-intervention survey responses according to family size

Figure 2.3 below shows the percentage of families surveyed pre-intervention according to their Socio-Economic Index for Areas 2001 (SEIFA index) for their postal area. The index of Advantage/Disadvantage was used in this analysis. The participants were grouped according to their quartile of the Australian averages for this SEIFA index. “Highest” indicates those in the 75% to 100% quartile (those better off). “High-Medium” indicates those in the 50% to 75% quartile. “Medium-Low” indicates those in the 25% to 50% quartile. “Lowest” indicates those in the 0% to 25% quartile. N/A refers to those who did not indicate their postcode.

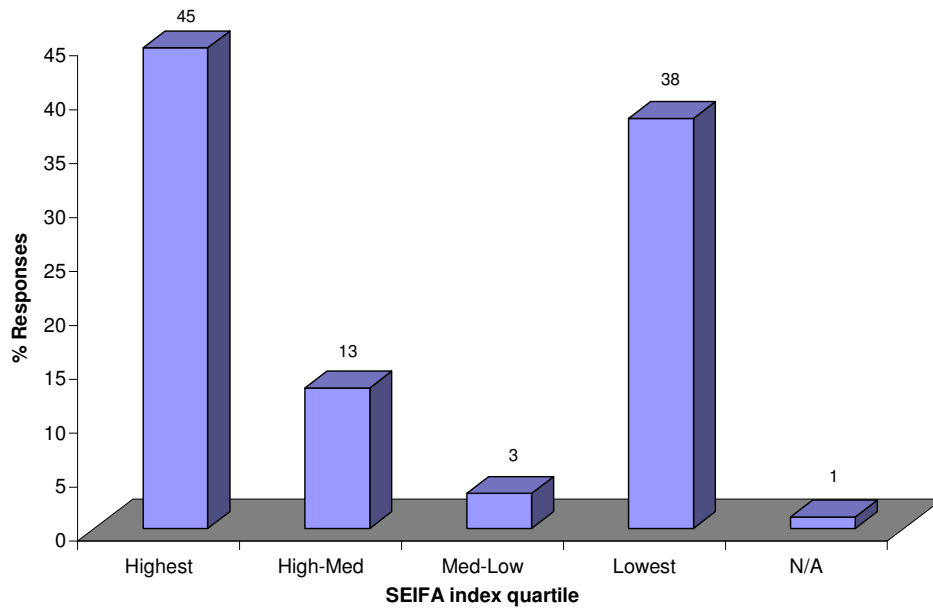


Figure 2.3. Percentage of pre-intervention survey responses in each SEIFA index quartile

Figure 2.4 below shows the distribution of pre-intervention participants according to the education level of the mother. They were grouped into five categories. “High school” included those who had gone to high school but not completed final year. “Year 12” included those who finished high school but did not go further. “TAFE/Diploma” included those who had done TAFE certificates, diplomas, or trades. “Uni degree” included those who had completed an undergraduate university degree. “Uni postgrad” included those who had completed further university degrees. There were no responses where the mother completed only primary school or less.

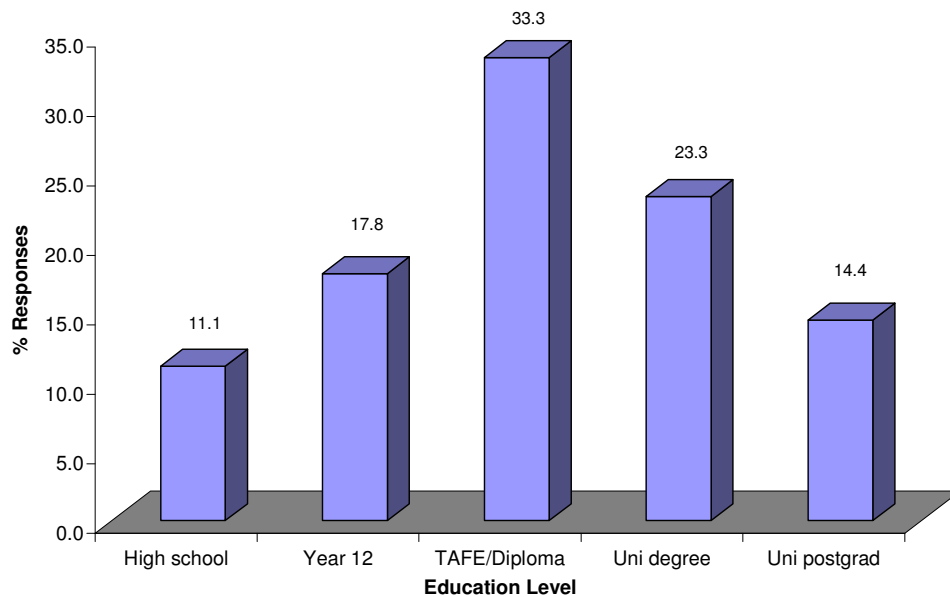


Figure 2.4. Distribution of pre-intervention participants according to the education level of the mother

2.4. POST-INTERVENTION PARTICIPANTS

Figure 2.5 below shows the distribution of post-intervention participants from each state.

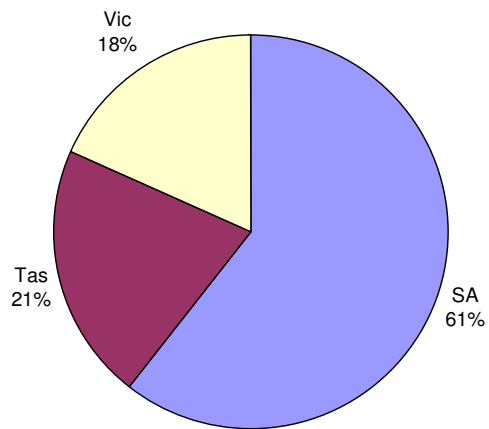


Figure 2.5. Distribution of post-intervention survey responses from Australia's states

Figure 2.6 below shows the size of the families surveyed post-intervention, according to how many children were in each family (No. of children). The percentage of families surveyed with each family size is shown (% Responses). The total number of children in all the families was 84. The average family surveyed had 2.2 (± 1.1) (mean (\pm standard deviation)) children.

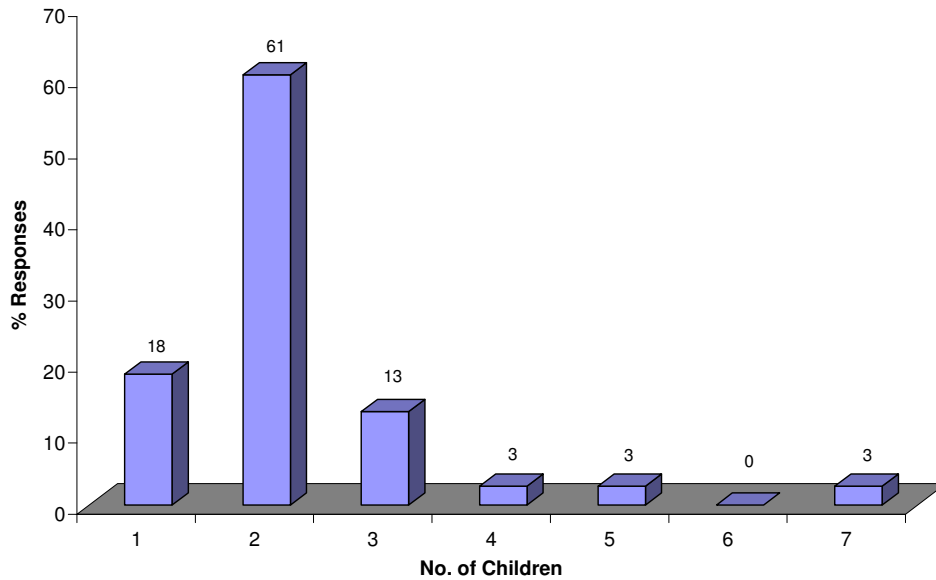


Figure 2.6. Distribution of post-intervention survey responses according to family size

Figure 2.7 below shows the percentage of families surveyed post-intervention according to their Socio-Economic Index for Areas 2001 (SEIFA index) for their postal area. The index of Advantage/Disadvantage was used and the participants were grouped as previously.

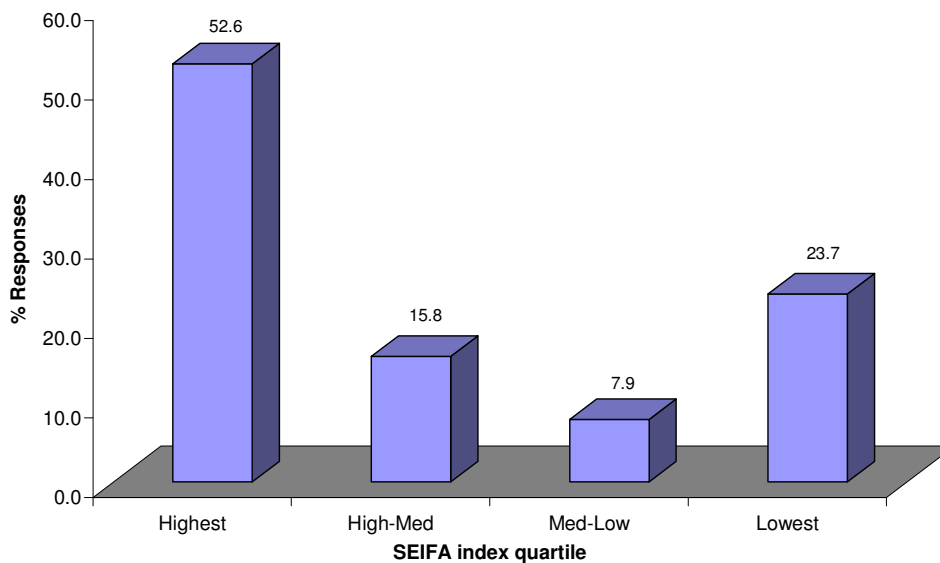


Figure 2.7. Percentage of post-intervention survey responses in each SEIFA index quartile

Figure 2.8 below shows the distribution of pre-intervention participants according to the education level of the mother. They were grouped into five categories as previously.

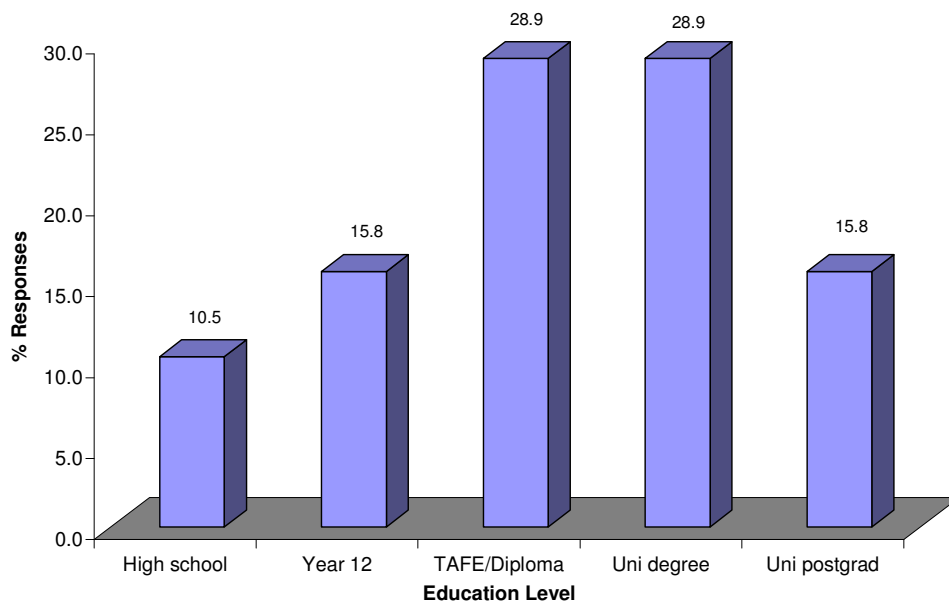


Figure 2.8. Distribution of post-intervention survey responses according to education level of the mother

3. RESULTS

3.1. OVERALL PRE-INTERVENTION SURVEY

All 92 pre-intervention survey results were analysed as a group and the results are shown in the following section. Each of the results refers to the child who is under seven years of age.

3.1.1. TV watching habits (section 2 of survey)

Monday to Friday

The duration of TV watched by the child averaged across Monday to Friday was on average (median) one to two hours per day. The most common channel watched was ABC with 57 % of the participants followed by the use of Videos/DVDs with 26 %. Mothers were by far the majority in control of the remote during these timeslots with 77.5% of the participants. The child was the next most in control of the remote with 9 % of the participants.

Saturday mornings

The duration of TV watched by the child on Saturday mornings was on average (median) less than half an hour, although it is nearly at the half an hour to one hour range. Therefore we can say it is close to half an hour. The most common channels watched on Saturday mornings were the commercial channels (7, 9, and 10) with 43 % of the participants, followed by the use of Videos/DVDs with 26 %. Mothers were still by far the majority in control of the remote during the

Saturday morning timeslot with 49 % of the participants. The child, father, and other sibling all had a similar control of the remote.

TV in child's bedroom

Only 11 % of families had a TV in their child's bedroom (child of under seven years). The reasons given for having this situation varied. All participants in this situation either showed no concern or only slight concern at having a TV in their child's bedroom.

3.1.2. Views about TV food advertising (section 3 of survey)

Question 3.1 - 54 % of participants either fully agreed or agreed to some extent that when their child wants unhealthy food (high fat, sugar, salt etc.), it's a hard job to change their minds. However, it is also interesting to note that over 43 % of participants fully disagreed or disagreed to some extent with this statement.

Question 3.2 - There was no clear result showing whether more or less participants felt that their child understands that the purpose of advertisements is to sell them something. Most responses were close to the middle of the continuum, showing that they had no strong feeling either way.

Question 3.3 - Over 41 % of participants either fully agreed or agreed to some extent that food ads on TV contribute to their child's requests for unhealthy foods. However, a similar number of over 44 % of participants fully disagreed or disagreed to some extent with this statement.

Question 3.4 - Around 62 % of participants either fully agreed or agreed to some extent that the use of characters from movies, TV programs or sporting heroes contribute to their child's requests for unhealthy foods.

Question 3.5 - A clear majority of 78 % of participants either fully agreed or agreed to some extent that they limit the amount of commercial TV their children watch. However, over 18 % of participants do not limit commercial TV at all.

Question 3.6 - There was no clear majority in response to the statement - "If I limit exposure to commercial TV, it will be easier to get my children to eat healthy foods". Most responses were close to the middle of the continuum showing they showed no strong feeling either way.

Question 3.7 - Nearly 92 % of participants fully disagreed or disagreed to some extent that it is, or would be, too hard to set limits on how much commercial TV their children watch.

3.1.3. Other comments (section 4 of survey)

From the 37 participants that responded in the "other comments" section we can categorise their thoughts into four areas - no problems, limit food ads, parents are the problem, and other statements.

Those in the “no problems” category suggest that they do not have an issue in their family that relates to TV food advertising. They suggest it either does not affect their children yet or they have suitable parental strategies that do not allow their children to be influenced by it.

The “limit food ads” category includes those who have stated that TV food advertising has had a negative effect on their family and those that ask for the advertising to be limited, particularly during kids’ TV programs.

Those in the “parents are the problem” suggest that they are doing things correctly for their family to eliminate the possible influences of TV food advertising, indicating that others are not. They indicate that parents have the responsibility to make healthy eating choices for their children and family.

Finally, the fourth category, “other statements”, includes those who have not fitted into previous categories yet state something about what they see amongst their family or others. The number who responded in each category is shown in Table 3.1 below.

Table 3.1. Responses to the other comments section

Category	Number
No problems	16
Limit food ads	11
Parents are the problem	5
Other statements	5
Total	37

3.2. PRE-INTERVENTION VS POST-INTERVENTION SURVEY

The pre-intervention and post-intervention survey results of the 38 participants who completed both were analysed to see if there were any overall obvious changes in practice or views.

3.2.1. TV watching habits (section 2 of survey)

Monday to Friday

The TV watched by the child on Monday to Friday shows no obvious changes between the pre- and post-intervention surveys. The duration of TV watched by the child averaged across Monday to Friday was on average (median) one to two hours for both surveys. The most common channel watched was easily the ABC with around 60 % in both surveys, followed by the use of Videos/DVDs. The mother was clearly most in control of the remote for both surveys.

Saturday mornings

The TV watched by the child on Saturday mornings showed a change in the channel most watched from one survey to the next. The most watched channels were the commercial channels (46 %) in the pre-intervention survey, whereas the most watched was Videos/DVDs (54 %) in the post-intervention survey. The other factors were similar between surveys.

TV in child's bedroom

There were no obvious changes in this area.

3.2.2. Views about TV food advertising (section 3 of survey)

Changes of views will be noted below only when there is a swing towards one side of the argument of 10 % of more.

Question 3.1 shows a swing of around 10 % towards the disagreeing side.

Question 3.2 shows little difference between the surveys.

Question 3.3 shows a swing of around 13 % towards the agreeing side.

Question 3.4 shows a swing of around 13 % towards the agreeing side.

Question 3.5 shows little difference between the surveys.

Question 3.6 shows a swing of around 13 % towards the agreeing side.

Question 3.7 shows little difference between the surveys.

3.2.3. Other comments (section 4 of survey)

Once categorised into the four areas (no problem, limit food ads, parents are the problem, other statement), the “other comments” section shows no obvious differences between the pre- and post-intervention surveys.

3.3. COMPARISONS BETWEEN INTERVENTION GROUPS

The pre-intervention and post-intervention survey results were compared for each intervention group. Their differences are shown in the following section. It is important to use these results with caution as the comparisons are made with very small and different numbers in each intervention group. Although these results are based on very small numbers the following section will attempt to show any obvious changes from the pre- to post-intervention survey results.

3.3.1. TV watching habits (section 2 of survey)

Monday to Friday

Group 1 showed slightly less duration of TV watching time in the post-intervention survey (half an hour to one hour, instead of one to two hours). Other factors did not change.

Groups 2, 3 and 4 showed no obvious changes across all factors.

Saturday mornings

Group 1 showed no obvious changes across all factors.

Group 2 showed a swing from watching a majority of commercial TV channels in the pre-intervention survey to a majority using Videos/DVDs in the post-intervention survey.

Group 3 showed a slight increase in the child being in control of the remote for the post-intervention survey.

Groups 3 and 4 showed the median value for the duration of TV watching to slightly increase from “none” in the pre-intervention survey to less than half an hour in the post-intervention survey.

TV in child's bedroom

There were no obvious changes in this area.

3.3.2. Views about TV food advertising

Due to the small numbers used, changes in views will be noted below only when there is a swing towards one side of the argument of 15 % or more. Others will be stated as “No change”. It is important to use these results with caution due to the small and different numbers in each group.

Table 3.2 below shows the percentage change in views between pre- and post-intervention surveys for each sub group for each question. A change in view towards the agreeing side of the statement will be shown as a positive (+), and a negative (-) for a change towards the disagreeing side. On occasions there may be a clear shift towards the “Don’t know” response (see Question 3.2, group 2).

Table 3.2. Percentage change in views about TV food advertising after intervention

Question #	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4
3.1	- 24 %	- 16 %	+ 20 %	No change
3.2	No change	Don't know	- 40 %	No change
3.3	+ 24 %	+ 15 %	- 20 %	No change
3.4	+ 29 %	No change	- 40 %	+ 33 %
3.5	No change	No change	- 20 %	+ 33 %
3.6	+ 18 %	No change	- 20 %	+ 33 %
3.7	No change	No change	No change	+ 33 %

3.3.3. Other comments (section 4 of survey)

It is unreasonable to make any judgments on any differences the interventions may have had on the “other comments” section due to the low number of comments.

3.4. COMMENTS ABOUT THE RESOURCES

Group 1 (received information booklet only)

88 % of participants of those that received the booklet said they read some or all of it.

88 % of participants found it either very useful (25 %) or somewhat useful (63 %).

25 % of participants stated they changed the way they think or act, as a result of the booklet. The changes made include - “More conscious of how often the TV is on” and “Refuse to buy something just because it has TV characters on it”.

Unfortunately, 35 % of group 1 (six participants) stated that they did not receive the information booklet.

Group 2 (received information booklet and DVD)

75 % of participants of those that received the DVD said they watched some or all of it.

78 % of participants found it either very useful (11 %) or somewhat useful (67 %).

80 % of participants of those that received the booklet said they read some or all of it.

71 % of participants found it either very useful (14 %) or somewhat useful (57 %).

18 % of participants stated they changed the way they think or act, as a result of the booklet and DVD. The changes made include - “Educating children more about how advertising works” and “We go through the TV guide and select in advance what to watch”.

Unfortunately, 8 % of group 2 (one participant) stated that they did not receive the information booklet or DVD.

Group 3 (attended Parent Information Session, and received information booklet and DVD)

100 % of participants said they watched the whole DVD.

100 % of participants found it either very useful (20 %) or somewhat useful (80 %).

100 % of participants said they read the whole information booklet.

100 % of participants found it either very useful (20 %) or somewhat useful (80 %).

100 % of participants also found the information session to be somewhat useful.

40 % of participants stated they changed the way they think or act, as a result of the session, booklet and DVD. The changes made include - “Even more aware of what is being watched, and I know that my reasons are justified” and “Will continue to limit TV watching”.

Group 4 had no intervention.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1. OVERALL PRE-INTERVENTION SURVEY

Across the larger sample of the pre-intervention survey, it is interesting to note that the majority of participants on Saturday mornings watched commercial TV. This is also the timeslot where the mother generally does not have as much of the control of the remote. Rather, the influence of older siblings is increased, or the choice remains with the child under seven. This becomes a crucial time of the week, where young children will be exposed most to TV food advertising in a situation where they are monitored less by their mother.

The views shown about TV food advertising in section 3 of the survey were quite mixed across the pre-intervention survey group. This shows that many parents may still not be aware of their child's exposure to TV food advertising, and the potential influence it may have on them. However, it also may suggest that some of the parents have already approached this issue with their children and made an effort to monitor what they watch and what they eat. Hence, they may not have their children requesting unhealthy foods.

4.2. PRE-INTERVENTION VS. POST-INTERVENTION SURVEY

The only change in TV watching habits between surveys was a movement from watching commercial channels to watching Videos/DVDs on Saturday mornings. It is possible that this reflects a changing attitude of the parents involved in this survey. As part of the interventions given, the information included suggestions for decreasing commercial TV watching such as replacing it with the ABC or Videos/DVDs.

The changes in views about TV food advertising were limited to four questions with movements ranging from 10 % to 13 %. Although these changes were small, they were all towards a direction that showed the parents were more aware of the exposure to TV food advertising and the potential influence it may have on their children.

4.3. COMPARISON BETWEEN INTERVENTION GROUPS

It is difficult to make any significant discussion around the difference between the intervention groups from the data gathered. The numbers were too small in each intervention group to get a realistic idea of any trends associated with TV watching or views about TV food advertising, which may have emerged because of the interventions.

4.4. COMMENTS ABOUT THE RESOURCES

Nearly all the comments on the resources were positive. All the resources have made some impact on some people's habits or views. The results suggest that group 3, who received all the resources, had the most positive changes to their habits and views, however, it is not possible to be sure of this due to the lower numbers in this group. It is also not clear which resource of the three was the most useful.

APPENDIX A

INFORMATION SHEETS AND CONSENT FORMS

APPENDIX B

SURVEY FORMS