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Relationships between family environment and children’s dietary behaviours: data from the 2006 Health Behaviour in School-aged Children survey

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The family environment has been shown to influence the dietary behaviours of young people⁽¹⁾. In Ireland, aspects of the family environment such as family size and structure have changed relatively recently⁽²⁾, making it timely to investigate the relationships between the family environment and the dietary habits of children living here. For this paper, data from the 2006 Irish Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) study were employed to investigate how family make-up, such as size and structure and maternal employment predict the dietary habits of children.

HBSC is a school-based survey with data collected through self-completion questionnaires administered in the classroom. HBSC Ireland collected data in 2006 from school children, aged 10–18 years (*n* 10 334). Ethical approval was granted for the study, and consent from schools, parents and children was obtained.

Self-reported data on foodstuff consumption and food behaviours were dichotomised into frequent (daily or >daily) *v.* less frequent consumption or behaviour. Associations between maternal employment, family structure and size and both foodstuff consumption and food behaviours were expressed in OR from logistic regression models in SPSS, version 15.0.

	Fruits>daily	Veg>daily	Cola daily	Diet cola daily	Crisps daily	Chips daily	Fish weekly
	Boys (Adj OR)						
Mother working	1.13	1.12	0.94	0.89	0.84	0.97	1.11
Both parents	1.17	1.21	0.95	0.67**	0.94	0.99	1.17
Large family	1.10	0.98	1.07	0.97	1.08	1.31*	0.93
	Girls (Adj OR)						
Mother working	1.06	0.98	0.75***	0.76**	0.84	0.60***	0.99
Both parents	1.24*	1.30*	0.73***	0.67**	0.70	0.90	1.28**
Large family	1.05	0.99	1.06	1.06	1.30**	1.74***	0.90

	Breakfast every weekday	Meal while watching television	Breakfast with parents	Evening meal with parents
	Boys (Adj OR)			
Mother working	0.89	1.03	0.99	0.93
Both parents	1.38**	0.73**	1.22	1.33**
Large family	0.81	0.96	0.85	0.99
	Girls (Adj OR)			
Mother working	1.08	0.83*	0.88	0.99
Both parents	1.66***	0.74**	1.36**	1.31**
Large family	0.85	0.95	1.03	1.08

P*<0.05; *P*<0.01; ****P*<0.001.

All analyses were controlled for age and family affluence and were stratified by gender. Living with both parents, having a mother who works and living in a family of 3 or fewer children were each associated with more healthful dietary habits in children. Irrespective of family affluence or age, girls in particular appear to be influenced by these family factors. The family environment should be considered in future nutrition policy in Ireland⁽³⁾.

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1. Patrick H & Nicklas TA (2005) *J Am Coll Nutr* 24, 83–92.
2. Central Statistics Office (2007) *Census 2006. Volume 3 Household Composition, Family Units and Fertility*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.
3. Department of Health and Children (2009) Report of the Inter-sectoral Group on the Implementation of the Recommendations of the National Taskforce on Obesity. http://www.dohc.ie/publications/report_ntfo.html (accessed April 2010).