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MEDIA RELEASE

Obese children result of junk-food marketers

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A new book by Simon Fraser University communication professor [Stephen Kline](#) investigates what he calls globesity – the global pandemic of obese children targeted by food marketers, plus the failure by society to successfully implement fitness campaigns and health education programs.

“Advocates in the USA, Canada and the UK have long claimed the vulnerability of young consumers to the constant marketing of unhealthy foods on children’s TV,” says Kline, author of *Globesity, Food Marketing and Family Lifestyles (2011/Palgrave Macmillan)*. “But the food industry argues that not only does research show advertising has a limited impact on children’s diet, it asserts it’s the parents’ responsibility to ensure children have a healthy lifestyle.”

“My book set out to review and study what we know about children’s consumer socialization, given that the obesity pandemic re-invigorated public concern with the TV diet and its promotion of unhealthy foods to kids around the world. To this end I studied food promotion on Canadian, British and U.S. TV. I also wanted to know how well B.C. families were coping with the difficulties of raising healthy kids within the ‘obesogenic’ fast food and sluggish kids culture.”

The reasons for population weight gain in the past 25 years are complex, but evidence shows that media use is crucial in the consumer socialization of children. Sedentary lifestyles and TV snacking can explain why some kids gain weight, but junk-food marketing has also made an impact.

Kline’s research shows that parents who regulate how much TV their children watch can play a big role in the fight against globesity. For example, children in B.C. are healthier than those in many parts of Canada, the U.S., and the U.K.

“My study of B.C. families indicates young children are less likely to be overweight because parents provide less scope for their discretionary leisure and consumption and work hard at supervising children’s lifestyle choices – especially use of media,” says Kline, a North Vancouver resident.

Another wrinkle that needs to be addressed is teaching teens, who are given more independence when it comes to their diet, to live a healthier lifestyle.

“Unfortunately, the moral panic about young children distracted us from the multiple lifestyle changes that accompany consumer ‘empowerment’ of teens in the media-saturated family. Teens gain more control over their lifestyles, and for this reason, they also need to be better educated about the risks associated with growing up in a mediated market culture,” Kline says.

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