Research in the U.S.A. and Europe has shown that ads that appear in children’s programs on TV are the antithesis of the recommended diet. They are generally of poor nutritional value and encourage children to consume foods that are highly refined and high in fat and sugar. Essentially all such previous research has been conducted in developed countries. In this study we examined food advertising on children’s TV in South Africa.

We recorded 3871 ads over an 18-month period, divided into two time slots: 12 hours of programs on SABC1 (9 a.m. to 11 a.m. on 6 occasions) and 12 hours of programs on SABC2. There were 408 ads of which 69 (16.9%) were for food (Table). These findings indicate that this is an important issue in developing countries. In South Africa, which is the focus of this study, most food consumed by children in schools in Cape Town is of poor nutritional quality (5). Rapid urbanization of the black population has led to a sharp increase in intake of fat, saturated fat, and sugar (6). Obesity is a fast growing problem (7). In order to help illuminate these trends we conducted a study to examine food advertising on children’s TV in South Africa.

**METHODS**

Children’s programs were recorded on two TV channels:

1. SABC1 was recorded from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. on 6 occasions. The programs were mainly for children below school age. The languages used are mainly English and Afrikaans plus a small amount of Xhosa. Out of 69 ads, 56% were for food. No fast food was advertised at all, but 54% of the food ads were for a group of foods of generally poor nutritional quality.

The 12 hours of programs on SABC2 had 47 ads but none were for food. A total of 37.5 hours of programs were recorded on YoTV.

**RESULTS**

The 12 hours of children’s TV programs on SABC2 had 47 ads but none were for food. A total of 37.5 hours of programs were recorded on YoTV.

1. YoTV was recorded from 3.00 p.m. to 5.30 p.m. on 8 occasions. The programs were mainly for children below school age. The languages used are mainly English and Afrikaans plus a small amount of Xhosa. Out of 47 ads, 97% were for food. Virtually all (95%) of the food ads were for a group of foods of generally poor nutritional quality.

**DISCUSSION**

There has been much debate about how to regulate food advertising directed at children (8). Some countries, such as Norway and Sweden, have banned such advertising while the UK announced in January 2008 that it also plans to do so. However, most other countries have lesser degrees of restriction. A major factor in this is strong resistance by industry when attempts are made to impose legislative restrictions on advertising (9). In our opinion a ban on food ads on children’s TV, or at least major restrictions, especially for young children, is a policy whose time has come (9).

**REFERENCES**