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# **Exploring the relationship between Big Food corporations and professional sports clubs: a scoping review**

## **Background**

Professional sport occupies a prominent place in cultures across the globe. Commercial organisations often use this prominence as a vehicle to promote their brands and products. There are increasing concerns about the growing number of people who are overweight and obese, and the contributory role that marketing of processed food and drink plays. We therefore undertook a scoping review to explore the relationship between professional sports clubs and food and drink marketing.

## **Methods**

The scoping review search terms focussed on four concepts: professional sports clubs; marketing; food and drink; and health impacts. Six academic databases were searched. We excluded mega events (such as Olympics and the Football World Cup) because of the attention already given to these. We likewise excluded alcohol marketing and sport, given the established literature exploring that relationship.

## **Findings**

We included six papers in the review with 4/6 coming from Australia and New Zealand. The Australasian literature was concerned with the marketing of (unhealthy) food and beverages to children and the potential (negative) impact on eating patterns. Rugby league, Australian Football and cricket were sports which were identified. Single papers from Turkey and the US explored issues around marketing and professional sports clubs. The Turkish paper analysed shirt sponsorship in football leagues internationally and showed food and beverage (including alcohol) companies are the most common sponsors. The US paper examined a mixed reaction to a football team named after an 'energy' drink.

## **Interpretation**

Given the current focus on how processed food is marketed to children, it is surprising that professional sports clubs have eluded the scrutiny of public health in the UK. Our review highlights the lack of public health research in this area. It signals

an urgent need for research that explores the inter-dependent commercial practices of food and drink companies and professional sports clubs.

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Each of the authors made a direct contribution to the manuscript. All prepared the original proposal. RI and CB agreed the search terms used. RI carried out the initial academic searching. All reviewed the papers selected and agreed those finally included in the review. Each author has seen and approved the abstract.

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