LOW-INCOME FAMILIES ARE UNHEALTHY DUE TO THE PROCESSED FOODS THEY BUY

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Topic Introduction
In the United States there are many low-income families that do not have the luxury of buying healthy food. The families that are likely to purchase healthy food products are the middle to high-income ones. The paper’s purpose will be to analyze how low-income families are unhealthy due to buying processed food and not healthier food. The paper’s first element talks about how low-income families are unhealthy due to buying cheap, pre-made food products that are high in sodium; people can see an increase in blood pressure which leads to significant health risks. The second element will discuss what the most likely places and products are that
low-income families will resort to when wanting to eat cheap. The third element will discuss whether there are any options for low-income families to get healthy, non-processed food. The most likely possibilities would be programs that take food donations from the community, using coupons for discounts, and food stamps. The fourth element will discuss what affects the price in healthy, non-processed food products. A couple of factors would be the scarcity and public demand of healthy food. The fifth element will discuss how the inability to buy healthy food has negative effects on children of low-income families. Some of the negative effects on children could range from developing health risks and learning bad eating habits at an early age. After analyzing the aforementioned elements, there will be more knowledge as to why low-income families are susceptible to being unhealthy.

Inexpensive, Sodium Rich Food and the Risks

The paper’s first element mentions how low-income families are unhealthy due to buying food that is pre-processed and high in sodium. The most likely food sources that are high in sodium are the ones that need to be microwaved or can be picked up when already cooked. Katherine Zeratzky explains what the purpose of sodium is for food. She is a Mayo Clinic nutritionist who says, “Salt (sodium chloride) serves a number of purposes. It helps prevent spoiling by inhibiting the growth of bacteria, yeast and mold. Salt also brings out the flavors in food.” This information is significant because it shows another reason, despite the inexpensiveness, why low-income families would want to buy processed food. When food already has flavor it is easy for the people who buy it to take it out of the box and eat it without needed to prepare it any further. Likewise, when it comes to selecting processed food the fact that it is inexpensive is another reason to buy it.

Low-income families are able to eat processed food because it is marked with affordable pricing. “THE “fact” that junk food is cheaper than real food has become a reflexive part of how we explain why so many Americans are overweight, particularly those with lower incomes,”
wrote Mark Bittman of The New York Times. An example of affordable food for low-income families would be the products that are labeled “Buy so many items for this price”. In grocery stores it will more than likely be the boxed products that will have these deals. Another example of affordable food would be the products that say “Buy so many items and get so many free”. This deal is attractive to low-income families because they can buy more food without needing to pay any extra money (which can be used for other meals). The marketing name for this promotion is called BOGO (buy one get one free). BOGOfetcher.com says, “While rarely presented to consumers in acronym form, this type of marketing technique is known as the BOGO, and is considered as one of the most effective forms of marketing special offers. People often get ecstatic at the thought of getting one item free and that makes BOGO deals very attractive to consumers.” Probably the most common way to spend less and get a lot of food would be to buy from the value menu at fast-food restaurants. “Customers who used to buy combo meals but don’t anymore discovered that “you can ‘bundle’ from the value menu and it is a cheaper price,”” according to Bonnie Riggs (White, 2012). A fast-food restaurant’s value menu allows a customer to pay a dollar for an item that can serve as the entrée, side, or drink of a meal. Low-income families rely heavily on value menus when money is scarce. After discussing the methods in which processed food is labeled as affordable, it is important to discuss the health risks that come with buying cheap, processed food.

By consuming food that is high in sodium, low-income families are at risk for having high blood pressure; this leads to the development of more health risks. The more sodium-rich food that is consumed leads to the possibility of hypertension. “This disorder, which is characterized by above-average blood pressure readings, increases the risk for heart disease, stroke, and kidney disease,” (Thompson and Manroe, 2010). The aforementioned health risks (that are caused by high blood pressure) have the capability of killing whoever comes down with
them. The recommended intake of sodium per day is 2,300 milligrams (Thompson and Manroe, 2010). Referring back to the inexpensive, high-sodium food that is sold in grocery stores and fast-food restaurants, one can assume that a low-income family would be susceptible to consuming more 2,300 milligrams of sodium. For low-income families eating processed food is more logical than paying a lot of money, but unfortunately the risks of processed food are not kind to these families.

Places where Processed Food is Bought
The second element of the paper talks about the places (where low-income families are likely to go) that sell processed food for cheap. Low-income families have to know which places offer affordable, processed food in order to spend as little money as possible. A likely place to go buy affordable food would be from the well-known grocery stores (Wal-Mart for example). The following quote will explain how Wal-Mart has the cheap food that low-income families would be looking for. “More important, the store hasn’t specified exactly what types of food will be discounted. For some reason, even though Walmart is the largest buyer of organic foods, I don’t expect organic produce, dairy or meat to make the cut. Instead, shoppers can expect discounts on the majority of what fills Walmart’s shelves: highly subsidized, processed food made with genetically modified ingredients,” (Blackwell, 2012). Stores that are smaller than Wal-Mart will often have loyalty programs in which customers can apply for a store card, save money on their purchases, and build points towards store rewards. The Banquet meals are an example of how one can save money at a smaller store. These meals are very cheap and are often labeled as one dollar and change. However, if a customer has a store’s loyalty card, then he/she can get a deal on the meals. Low-income families can take advantage of the savings because one can get, for example, ten Banquet meals for ten dollars and so on with a loyalty card. Grocery stores, big and
small, have offers that attract low-income customers to buy its processed food, but there is another place that offers pre-made food at low prices.

Fast-food restaurants are the other source of buying cheap food. McDonalds is the most popular fast-food restaurant in the United States. Many people are attracted to McDonald’s dollar menu which features sodium-rich, delicious items. Some of the main products that they feature on their dollar menu are the McDouble cheeseburger and the McChicken sandwich. Both items are pre-made which means that they possess high amounts of sodium; the people who buy the dollar menu items are pleased with the taste but can be at risk for consuming too much sodium.

Options for Low-Income Families

The paper’s third element discusses whether there are any options available to low-income families to buy healthy food. One of the options that would benefit low-income families would be food donations. The way this option becomes successful is by allowing a community to donate food that will be distributed to lower-income families. The most common times in which food donations take place for low-income families are during the holidays.

Another method in which low-income families can get healthy food is by using food stamps. The Food Stamp Program has a rich history. “On Jan. 31, 1964, President Johnson requested Congress to pass legislation making the FSP permanent. Among the official purposes of the Food Stamp Act of 1964 were strengthening the agricultural economy and providing improved levels of nutrition among low-income households,” (United, n.d.). “The Food Stamp Program is designed to safeguard the health and well-being of low-income Americans by providing them access to a healthy, nutritious diet. Benefits are awarded to participating families in a manner designed to ensure that families have the resources to purchase an adequate supply of nutritious foods,” (United, n.d.). Food stamps have always been and will be available to low-income families who are in need of healthy food.
Coupons are another way for low-income families to have access to healthy, nutritious food. Families can receive coupons through their mail. “They clip and use both store and manufacturers’ coupons and often mentioned shopping in large chain stores offering double coupon redemption and “two-for-one” specials,” (United, n.d.). The purpose of coupons has to be to lift the burden off low-income families of paying high prices for healthy food that would not be affordable without the coupons. (Continue)

Factors that Affect the Price

The fourth element to discuss is the reasoning behind the high prices in healthy food. “Food prices and diet costs may be one factor limiting the adoption of healthier diets, especially by the low-income consumer,” (Maillot et al., 2007). The first thought that comes to mind when thinking about healthy is the word “natural”. Food comes from nature and the more natural food humans can consume the more nutrients that humans can get. However, circumstances arise when certain food is not able to grow and be distributed to grocery stores. An example of a situation in which a high price would be set on a product is when that product has been destroyed by weather conditions. During the summer of 2012 in Texas, and in other parts of the country, it had not rained. The fields were planted with corn, but due to the extreme temperatures much of the harvest died. The New York Times (2012) came out with a piece saying that, “The scorching heat and the worst drought in nearly a half-century have threatened to send food prices up, spooking consumers and leading to worries about global food costs. On July 25, the United States government said it expected the record-breaking weather to drive up the price for groceries in 2013, including milk, beef, chicken, and pork. The drought affected 88 percent of the corn crop, a staple of processed foods and animal feed as well as the nation’s leading farm export.” Not only do extreme temperatures play a role in destroying crops but natural disasters do as well. The natural disasters that damage crops the most are those that consist of heavy
amounts of water: hurricanes, typhoons, and floods. “Sudan, Uganda, and Afghanistan have all experienced food crises due to drought, and recent flooding in Madagascar wiped out vital food crops which could lead to a food emergency in the future,” (Emergency, n.d.). The influence that nature has on healthy food and its price can determine the affordability for low-income families. Another factor that determines the price of healthy food is the public demand for it. The public influences the price of healthy food when there is an increase in sales of a certain product. In order for sales of a healthy food to rise there has to be a reason for buying. It is possible that an endorsement for a healthy food was done by someone famous, for example an athlete or an actor/actress. Another reason for the increased sales is that the buyers like the nutritional benefits that the food offers. For example, most of the population in Alaska is vitamin D deficient due to the lack of sun they receive each year. Therefore, the foods that possess the highest quality of vitamin D are the ones that can get priced the highest due to the demand by Alaska’s population. Another example is that the world’s population is rapidly growing and more food will need to be bought to keep up with the population; the price of healthy food begins to rise and it becomes more difficult to afford this food. Bloomberg.com (2011) said that, “The world population is forecast to climb to 9.2 billion in 2050 from an estimated 6.9 billion in 2010, requiring a 70 percent jump in world agricultural production, the FAQ said.” With a 70 percent rise in agricultural production there is no doubt that the price of healthy food is growing and will continue to grow. Due to these factors that increase price, trying to buy healthy food has become a more difficult task for low-income families.

Risk for Children

The inability for a low-income family to buy healthy food can have negative effects on the children in these families. If a low-income family is willing to resort to the unhealthy, processed food for the majority of their meals, then the children are going to experience health risks. Katherine Alaimo (2001) said that, “Low-income children were significantly more likely
than high-income children to be reported to be in fair or poor health, to be iron deficient, and, in
the younger group, to have an impairment limiting their activities.” The source mentions that the
health of low-income children was not up to the standards of the high-income children. The
reasoning behind that statement is that high-income children are fed the highest-quality food
with the most nutrients; they rarely have any health risks. Another risk for children in low-
income families is the possibility of becoming obese. With childhood obesity follows the risk of
carrying the extra weight into adulthood. The longer that a child carries his/her weight the more
susceptible they are to developing heart disease, diabetes, and high cholesterol which leads to
death. By having to live in a low-income household, a child will not only deal with poor health
and obesity, but trying to do well in school will be difficult.

When low-income children are forced to eat processed food for their meals and deal with
poor health and obesity they tend to struggle through school. Some of the struggles that children
will endure are common. “It also is known that food insecurity is particularly harmful to
children, resulting in lower test scores, poorer school achievement, increased absences, higher
levels of hyperactivity and anxiety, and more frequent health problems,” (Winter, 2004). If these
low-income children are not forced to eat processed meals for their entire childhood then there is
a chance that they cannot have poor health or carry around extra weight. Just by being a part of a
low-income family, children are vulnerable to health risks because of the food they are forced to
eat.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the purpose of this paper is to analyze how low-income families are
unhealthy due to buying more processed foods than healthy, nutritious foods. The first element
summarizes how low-income families can buy food (preserved by sodium which has health
risks) for cheap prices. One of the health risks that a family could have by buying a lot of
sodium-rich food is high blood pressure which can lead to heart attacks. The second element
discusses the places where low-income families are likely to buy sodium-rich foods. The places with the best prices for low-income families are the grocery stores (with deals such as the buy one get one free) and the fast-food restaurants (which feature the dollar menu items). The third element is about options that are available to low-income families so they can buy healthy, nutritious food. Some the options discussed are food stamps, coupons, community food donations. The fourth element is what are the factors that make healthy food so expensive? The factors are how nature affects food, the public highly demanding healthy food, and that the world population is growing and needs a lot of nutritious food. The final element of the paper is the risks that children can have from living in a low-income family. The risks range from poor health, being obese, and doing poorly in school. After analyzing the struggles, strategies, and the characteristics of the inexpensive, processed food that low-income families buy, it is hard to think as to why these families would not be unhealthy.