

UC Davis study questions link of fast food to lower-income obesity

By Carlos Alcalá, Sacramento Bee

Fast food alone cannot be blamed for high obesity rates among people with low incomes, according to a new UC Davis Center for Healthcare Policy and Research study.

The research calls into question stereotypes that have led some cities in Southern California to cite obesity when passing laws limiting or banning new fast-food restaurants in poorer communities.

Nutritionists and food policy experts, however, said that doesn't let fast food off the hook – and at least one of the UC Davis researchers agreed.

“I'm not a big fan of fast food,” said J. Paul Leigh, lead author of the study, which will be published in Population Health Management in December. “I'm sure that fast food in general has a big effect on obesity. This research does not contradict that.”

It does challenge the notion that those with low incomes eat more fast food than those with higher incomes.

Health economists Leigh and co-author DaeHwan Kim analyzed data from the mid-1990s and compared household income with visits to fast-food and full-service restaurants.

Rather than finding fast-food visits going down with income, they found visits peak at \$60,000 in income, before falling slightly.

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