

research snapshot

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The Relationship Between Fathers' Social Media Use and Their Food Parenting Practices

What this research is about

Parents play an important role in children's eating behaviours. One way that parents exert their influence is through their food parenting practices. Parents may use social media to seek information on how to guide their children's eating habits. However, there is limited research on how social media use may influence food parenting practices.

Parents may use social media to seek information and support, which can foster positive food parenting practices. On the other hand, parents may use social media to compare their parenting practices. If parents compare themselves to others whose practices seem more "ideal," this can lead to feelings of inadequacy and stress. As a result, parents may engage in negative food parenting practices, such as using food as a reward. In this study, the researchers examined how mothers and fathers use social media and how it relates to their parenting practices around food.

What the researchers did

The researchers used data from the Guelph Family Health Study (GFHS). The GFHS is an obesity prevention intervention study. It recruited families with at least one child aged 1.5 to 5 years old living in Guelph, Ontario. The families were recruited through social media, community events, and posters. After completing the baseline assessment, families were randomly assigned to the intervention or control group. The intervention involved home visits by a dietitian to help families achieve their health goals. Data were collected one year later from 191 families via an online survey. The parents reported on their social media habits, food parenting practices for each child separately, and demographic details. A total of 179 mothers and 116 fathers completed the

What you need to know

Many parents use social media to seek information on feeding their children and sharing meal experiences. Nevertheless, social media use does not necessarily improve food parenting practices. This study examined how mothers and fathers use social media and its impact on their food parenting behaviours. The results showed that mothers' social media use was not related to their food parenting practices. However, fathers who used social media to share and compare food choices had less healthy practices, such as using food as a reward and for emotional regulation.

online survey. Most parents were white (85.1%) and had a high socioeconomic status.

In this study, the researchers investigated the impact of parents' social media use on food parenting practices and family meals. They considered factors like income, ethnicity, age, child sex, and group assignment (intervention or control).

Food parenting practices were assessed using the Comprehensive Feeding Practices Questionnaire (CFPQ). The researchers grouped 10 food parenting practices into three categories:

- 1) Coercive control: using food for emotional regulation, using food as a reward, pressuring to eat, and health-related restriction;
- 2) Structure: promoting a healthy home environment, modelling healthy eating, monitoring unhealthy foods, and letting children decide how much to eat;

- 3) Autonomy support: involving children in meal planning, and encouraging dietary balance and variety.

These practices were rated on a 4-point scale, with higher scores indicating more frequent use.

What the researchers found

While many parents used social media, more mothers than fathers reported using it to seek information on child feeding and family meals (64.8% of mothers vs. 25.0% of fathers). Mothers were also more likely to use social media to share and compare family meals and food choices (41.9% of mothers vs. 19.8% of fathers). Mothers tended to use Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat more, while fathers preferred YouTube, LinkedIn, and Twitter.

Mothers' social media use did not affect their food parenting practices. However, fathers who used social media to share and compare family meals and food choices were more likely to engage in negative food parenting practices, such as using food as a reward. They were also less likely to engage in positive practices, such as encouraging balance and variety.

How you can use this research

Understanding the factors that influence food parenting practices can help inform strategies to support positive food parenting. The study's findings can inform strategies to promote healthy social media use among parents of young children. Further exploring the information-seeking behaviours of mothers and fathers may help explain why significant associations were only found between fathers' use of social media to share and compare family meals and their food parenting practices. The findings from this research can provide valuable insights for developing interventions aimed at promoting positive food parenting practices.

About the researchers

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Citation

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Research Snapshot by Emily Kenny

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The Vanier Institute of the Family has partnered with the Knowledge Mobilization Unit at York University to produce Research Snapshots.

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