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**Topic:** Malnutrition treatment and prevention

**Title:** Factors influencing food choices of mothers with primary school children in the Metro-North Education District of the Western Cape, South Africa

**Presentation Type:** Poster

**Introduction:** Mother's unhealthy food choices can have a negative impact on child health by resulting in unhealthy eating behaviour of their offspring that persists into adulthood. The aim of the study was to determine the knowledge, attitude and practices (KAP) and barriers that influence food choices of mothers with primary school children, as well as the impact of socio-economic status on these factors.

**Methods:** A cross-sectional, descriptive study with a mixed method approach was conducted. Self-administered questionnaires were used to collect data on socio-demographics and food-related KAP of mothers (n=476). Six focus group discussions were conducted with mothers (n=37) to investigate barriers to healthy eating.

**Results:** The mean nutrition knowledge score for the group was 68.6%. Using analysis of variance (ANOVA), the nutrition knowledge was significantly lower ( $p < 0.05$ ) in the lower quintile school (64%). Mothers from the higher quintile school had a greater awareness of their role in shaping a child's eating habits compared to mothers from the lower quintile school ( $p < 0.05$ ). The former group engaged in unhealthier food preparation methods more often ( $p < 0.05$ ). The main factors influencing food purchases were cost (60%), nutritional value (37%) and time constraints (29%). Barriers included the school environment, mixed media messages and supermarket layout.

**Conclusion:** Nutrition education remains a priority especially among lower socio-economic groups and should include practical advice regarding the preparation of cost-effective, wholesome meals. The school-and supermarket environment, as well as food industry, can play a pivotal role in facilitating healthy food choices of mothers with primary school children.