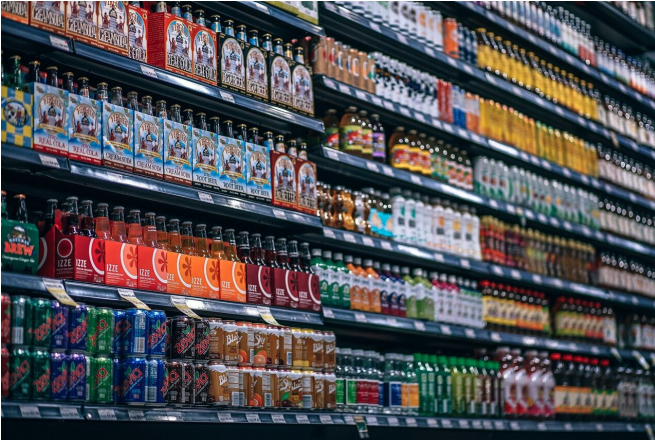


Poor water quality linked to sugar drink consumption

29 August 2019



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Consumption of sugary drinks is common among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander infants and toddlers, and it could be down to water quality, according to a study from The Australian National University (ANU).

Lead author, Dr. Katie Thurber, says there are clear opportunities to improve nutrition for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander [children](#), as well as non-Indigenous children, across Australia.

"Families living in regional and remote settings have expressed concern about the safety and quality of [drinking](#) water," said Dr. Thurber, from the Research School of Population Health.

"This can leave families with no choice but to avoid tap water and instead buy bottled drinks, cordial or other sugary drinks."

The study looked at more than 900 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children zero to three years old.

"The good news is we found that half of children

aged zero to three years in the study had never consumed sugary drinks," Dr. Thurber said.

"However, the bad news is that the other 50 percent in the study had consumed sugary drinks, and this started as early as the first year of life."

Consumption of cordial was most common, at 47 percent of all children, followed by [soft drink](#) at 19 percent and sweetened tea and coffee at 13 percent.

These young children were less likely to have ever had sugary drinks if their families experienced socioeconomic advantage, [social support](#), limited stressors, good wellbeing, and support from health services.

"We need to support families as a whole, and address life stressors and circumstances that can get in the way of a healthy diet," Dr. Thurber said.

"Families need relevant advice from health professionals, but improving information and knowledge is only one part of the solution. We also need programs and policies to improve the social determinants of health if we want to improve nutrition."

Co-author Associate Professor Ray Lovett said: "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families disproportionately experience socioeconomic disadvantage and life stressors, stemming from colonization and its lasting impacts. This includes structural inequities and racism."

The researchers found babies and toddlers living in cities and regional centers were significantly less likely to consume [sugary drinks](#) than children in remote areas.

This is linked to reduced access to safe drinking water and reduced accessibility and affordability of recommended beverages.

"Reducing sugary drink intake will require improving [water quality](#) across Australia," Dr. Thurber said.

"Sugary drink intake is too high among all Australian children more broadly."

The research paper is published in the *Public Health Nutrition* journal.

Provided by Australian National University

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