

PARENTS' CONCERNS ABOUT INFANT WEIGHT AND COMPLEMENTARY FEEDING PRACTICES: AN EMPIRICAL NATIONWIDE STUDY IN SPAIN

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INTRODUCTION

Parents' concerns about the child's risk of being overweight have received a lot of attention from scholars. Results from these studies reveal that parents' use of controlling and restrictive feeding practices is a consequence of parents' concern about their child becoming overweight.

This stream of research has been mostly conducted on samples of parents of children older than 2 years.

The objective of this study was to analyze the influence of parents' concerns of their infants' (aged 6 to 18 months) weight on the introduction of complementary foods.

Feeding practices at this stage of life are essential for the development of healthy eating habits in the long-term¹.

METHODS

A research firm collected the data from their online national panel and randomly selected a final sample of 634 Spanish parents, responsible for feeding their infants (aged 6 to 18 months).

A 2-item scale (e.g., "I am concerned about my child becoming overweight"; Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.70$) adapted from Birch et al², was used to measure concern about weight.

Items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest). In addition, parents were asked to indicate whether or not they were feeding their child with several complementary foods (Table 1).

One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to analysis data with SPSS (v.18).

CONCLUSION

- Our results show that **exposure of new (complementary) foods to infants is associated with parents' concerns about their infant weight.**
- In particular, **increased dietary variety was significantly related to lower levels of concern.**
- Exposure to new foods at early stages in life is critical in the development of infants' eating behavior, and does not necessarily lead to infants overweight. In fact, the restriction of complementary foods can provoke overall dietary nutrient inadequacy and suboptimal childhood growth and development.
- **Health professionals could advice parents, who are concerned about their infant weight, about the many benefits of offering infants nutritionally adequate and varied complementary foods.**

Table 1. Mean differences in concern about weight (sd) associated with type of complementary food given to children (n=634)

Type of complementary food	Child does not eat this food	Child eats this food	F-value
Infant cereals	3.22 (0.94)	2.92 (1.13)	3.82*
Fruits	3.48 (0.89)	2.88 (1.13)	18.14**
Vegetables	3.40 (0.96)	2.86 (1.13)	18.75**
Yogurt	3.22 (1.07)	2.84 (1.12)	13.91**
Meat	3.42 (0.98)	2.80 (1.12)	35.05**
Cheese	3.06 (1.08)	2.77 (1.15)	10.48**
Fish ¹	3.30 (1.00)	2.81 (1.14)	21.79**
Eggs ²	3.42 (1.01)	2.75 (1.16)	23.95**
Pulses ²	3.25 (1.04)	2.79 (1.18)	11.50**

¹Analysis with fish only for children > 8 months (n=568);

²Analysis with eggs and pulses only for children > 12 months (n=351);

*Significant differences at p<0.05; **Significant differences at p<0.01.

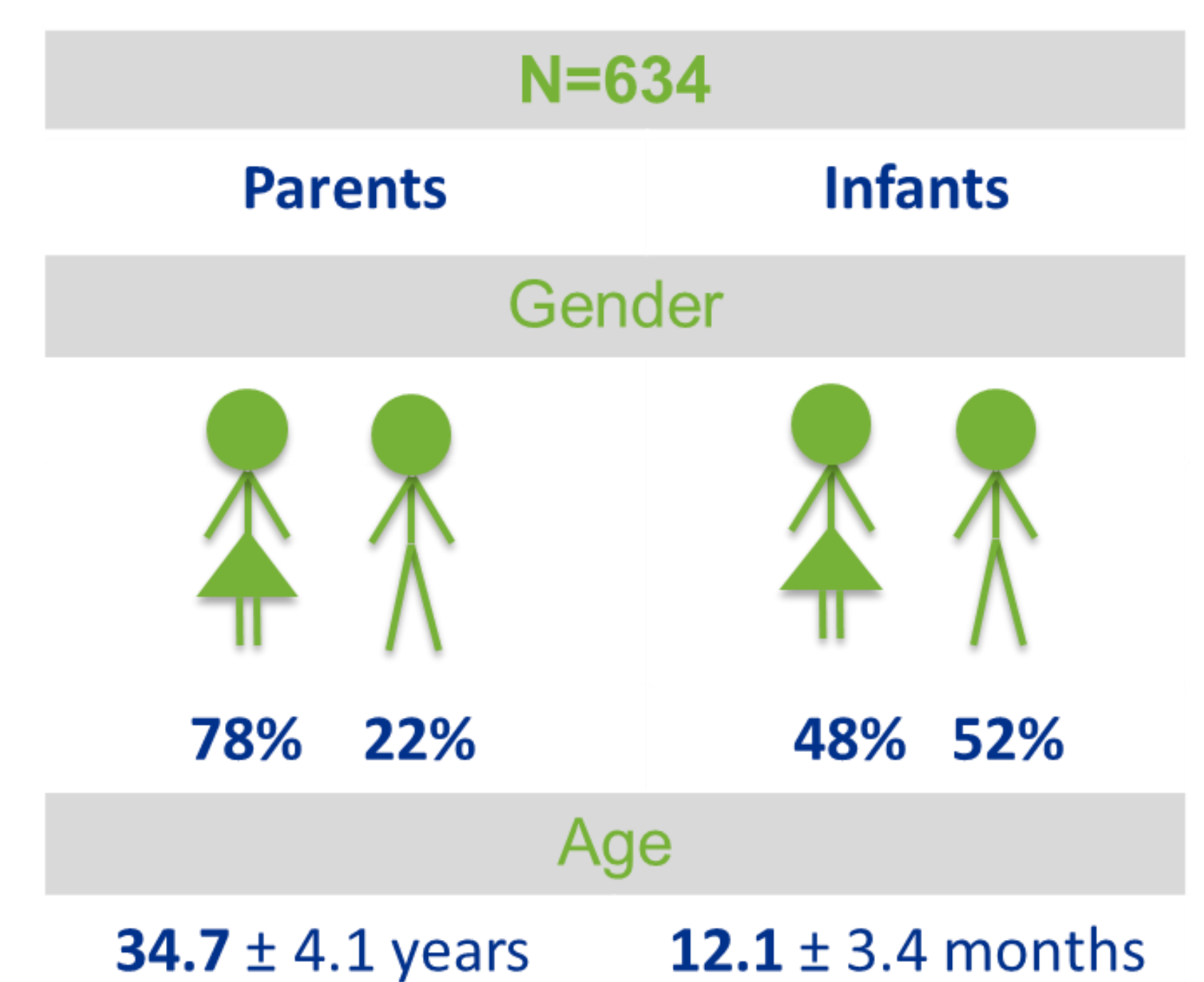


Figure 1. Demographic characteristics of the sample

RESULTS

- The final sample for this study consisted of 634 parents (average age=34.7±4.1; 77.9% female) of infants aged 6 to 18 months (average age=12.05±3.4, 48.4% female) (Figure 1).
- Parents concern in the overall sample was 2.95±1.12.
- Results from the ANOVA (Table 1) revealed that concern about infant weight was significantly lower when infants were fed with complementary foods (in all cases).

REFERENCES

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Disclosure of Interest:

S. Roman: None Declared. M.J. Bernal, J.F. Haro, L.M. Sanchez-Siles: Conflict with Hero Group.