

Body Size Preferences and Taste Preferences Drive Food Choice Among Mothers and Children in Malawi

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Background

Malawi

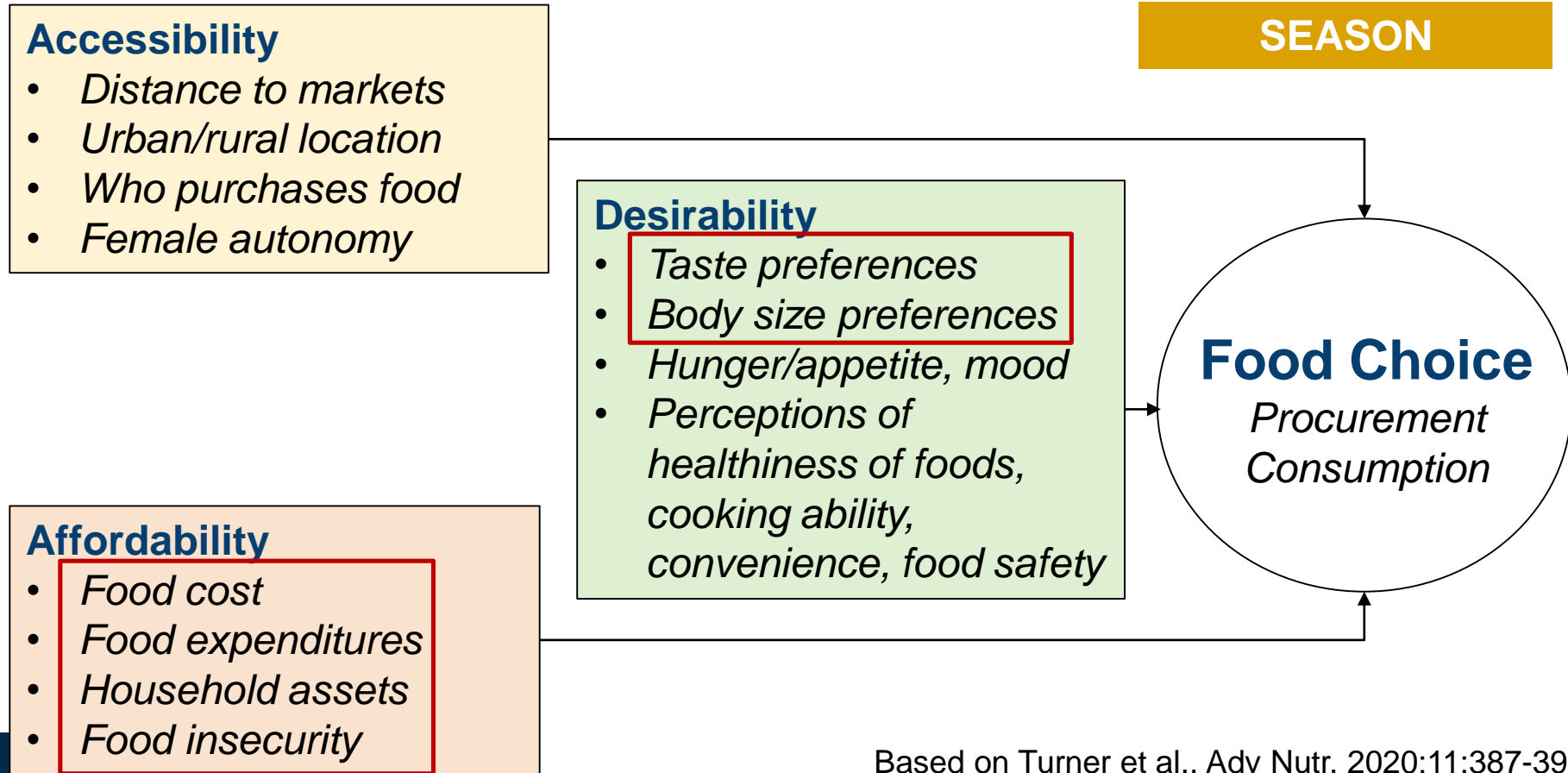
- 21% mothers overweight/obese
- 5% children <5 years overweight/obese



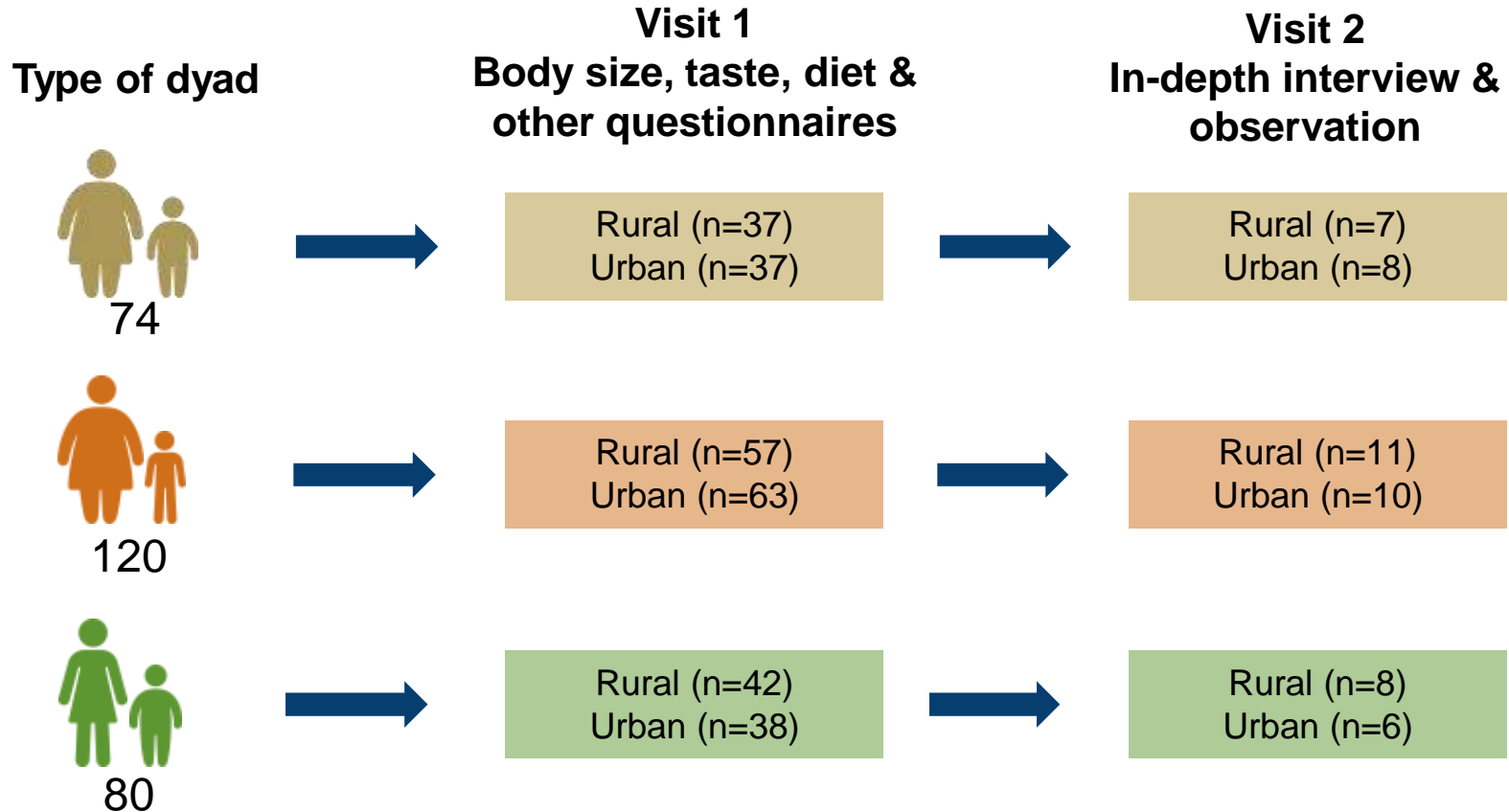
Photo credit: Valerie Flax

Mother and child in Lilongwe

Conceptual Framework



Study Design (N=274 dyads)



8 sites in 2 districts—Lilongwe and Kasungu; dry and rainy seasons

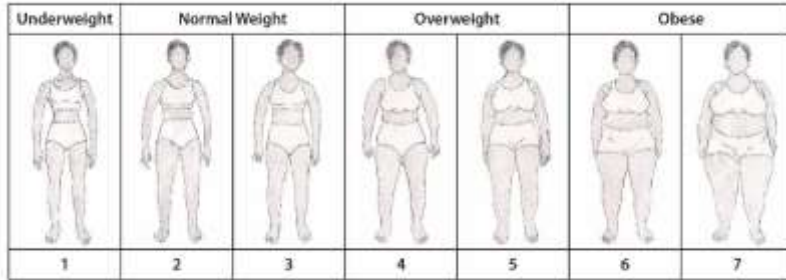
Food Preference Checklist

- 130 food items from Malawi food composition table plus additions of packaged foods
- 5-point hedonic scale

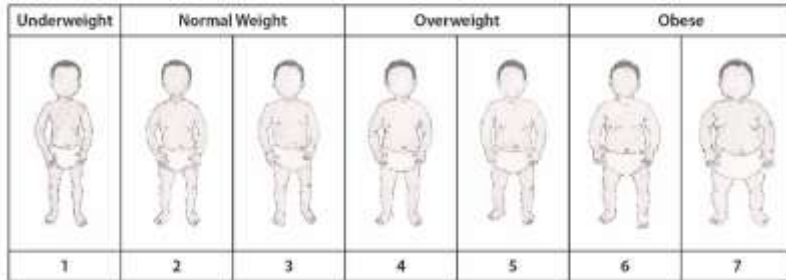
No	Food	CODING CATEGORIES					Has never eaten
		Dislike Extremely	Dislike	Neither Dislike Nor Like	Like	Like Extremely	
GRAINS							
1.	White bread, <u>buledi</u> , buns/scone, <u>sikono</u>	1	2	3	4	5	0
2.	African bread, <u>chimimina</u>	1	2	3	4	5	0
3.	Doughnut, fritters/mandazi, wheat dough deep fried	1	2	3	4	5	0
4.	Green maize, <u>chimanga</u>	1	2	3	4	5	0
5.	<u>Nsima</u> , <u>mgaiwa</u>	1	2	3	4	5	0
6.	<u>Nsima</u> , <u>ufawovera</u>	1	2	3	4	5	0

Body Silhouettes

A: Mothers



B: Children



Mother in Lilongwe using child body silhouettes

Photo credit: Valerie Flax

Main Drivers of Food Choice

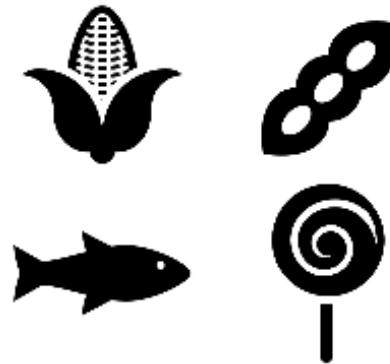
Taste Preferences



Affordability or Cost

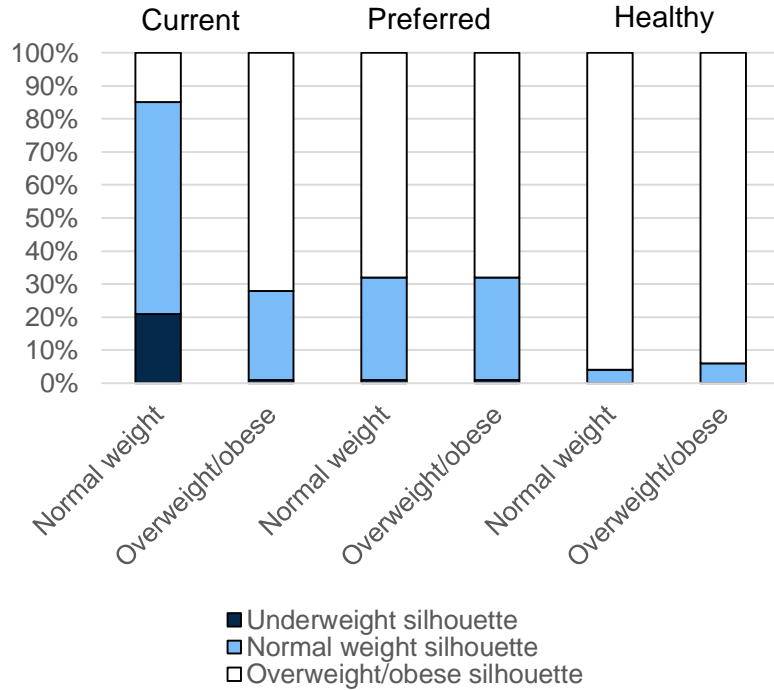


Body Size Preferences

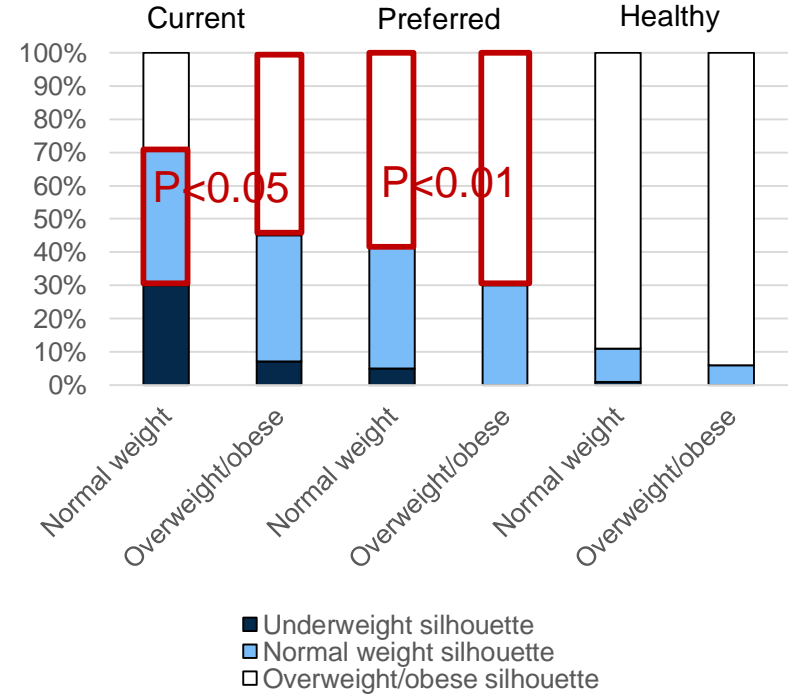


Maternal Body Size Preferences

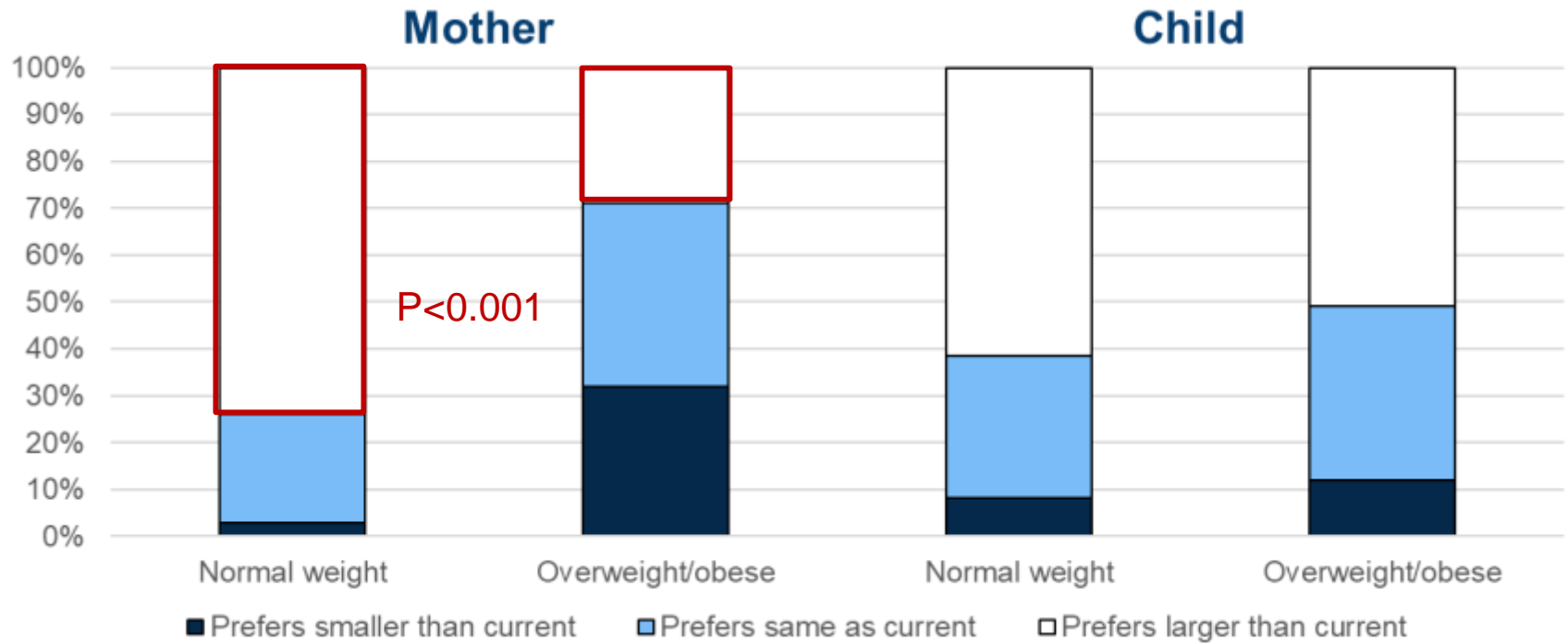
Mother



Child



Relationship Between Preferred and Current Body Size



Prefers normal weight body size

“I want to get slimmer. [When you are heavy] you get tired when walking and you look older than your age.”

- *Overweight mother*

“A child faces many challenges when they are very fat, and it is hard to be active.”

- *Mother of overweight child*

Prefers overweight body size

“I want to look fat, and people should know that I eat well.”

- *Normal weight mother*

“The woman [with a large body] looks strong and healthy.”

- *Overweight mother*

“The picture [Silhouette 6] looks good and the baby is healthy and doesn't fall sick and plays a lot.”

- *Mother of normal weight child*

Foods for Mothers to Attain Desired Body Size

Want smaller body size (N=63)



“[I will] start consuming less fats and oils, eat more green leafy vegetables and less milk and meat. This would help me slim up.” – *Overweight mother*

Want same or larger body size (N=205)



“I should be eating meat, sausage, *maheu* [sweetened grain drink], and fruits.” – *Normal weight mother*

Foods for Children to Attain Body Size Desired by Mother

Want smaller body size (N=28)



“By reducing giving him fatty foods and sometimes just cooking porridge, he can [become] slim.” – *Mother of overweight child*

Want same or larger body size (N=240)



“[I give him] *maheu*, yogurt, juice, soya bean porridge, *nsima*, and vegetables so he will grow fat and will be protected from infections.” – *Mother of overweight child*

Cost is a Challenge to Buy Foods to Gain or Maintain Weight

“I can’t afford to change what I eat because I do not have money for better foods.”

– *Normal weight mother*

“We do buy [those foods], but it's once in a while due to money problems.”

– *Mother of an overweight child*

Conclusions

- Mothers were accurate at assessing their own weight status but less accurate for their children
- They generally preferred larger body sizes for their children, but preferred larger body sizes for themselves if they were normal weight
- Only 1/3 of overweight/obese women wanted a smaller body size, suggesting knowledge gaps about the adverse health consequences of overweight/obesity
- The types of foods they listed to increase weight were a mix of healthy and unhealthy foods, but purchase of some of the foods was constrained by cost

Recommendations

Findings could contribute of Ministry of Health goal to prevent obesity by:

- Increasing knowledge about which silhouettes represent health body sizes and increase awareness of negative health consequences of overweight/obesity
- Double duty messages on which foods are healthy and unhealthy for mothers and children

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Study Team



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