



Ultra-Processed Food Consumption in Cambodia: Changing Food Environments

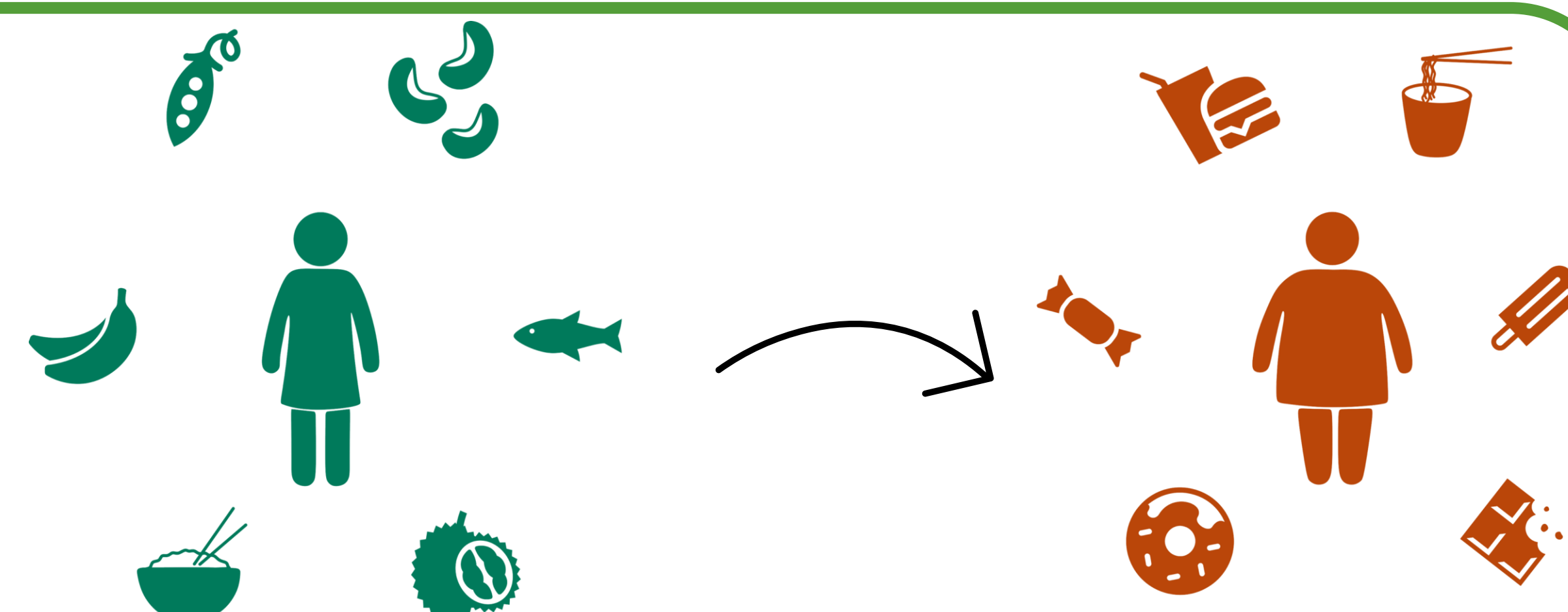
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Introduction

Cambodia is undergoing a **nutrition transition**, resulting in a shift from traditional diets to energy-dense, processed foods

- Rising rates of non-communicable diseases (**NCDs**) alongside persisting undernutrition and micronutrient deficiencies
- Changes in the **food environment** influence purchasing behavior, dietary intake, and food perceptions



Methods

Data collected in 2021 as part of the **GIZ Multisectoral Food and Nutrition Security project**

Quantitative Data

Household surveys with **1036** caregivers of children aged 6–59 months in urban (Phnom Penh), semi-urban (Kampot), and rural areas (Kampot, Kampong Thom)

- **Data collected:** Caregivers and children's food consumption, perceptions of food groups, socioeconomic factors, and media exposure
- **Indicator calculated:** i.a. Global Dietary Recommendation (GDR) score for diet quality

$$\text{GDR} = \text{NCD-protect} - \text{NCD-risk} + 9$$

→ higher score = better adherence to healthy dietary guidelines

Food environment assessments to capture type and products traded by 147 vendors

Qualitative Data

15 focus group discussions exploring motivations behind specific food choices.

7 expert interviews about nutrition transition, its causes and consequences.



Results

- **Urban children:** higher consumption of unhealthy food groups and lower consumption of healthy food groups (Figure 1).
- **Rural children:** significantly higher mean GDR score than urban children (10.0 ± 1.8 vs. 9.5 ± 1.9 , $p < 0.001$).
- **Healthy food groups** were consistently recognized across all locations; perceptions of **unhealthy foods** varied more.
- **Ultra-processed** packaged salty snacks were rated "healthy" or "somewhat healthy" by 21.9% of urban vs. 30.3% of rural caregivers (Figure 2).
- Regular food **advertising exposure** was linked to more accurate perception of unhealthy food groups, but also to higher consumption of them.



Figure 3: Examples of ultra-processed food sold in Cambodia © F.Lang

Consumption of "Other Sweets"

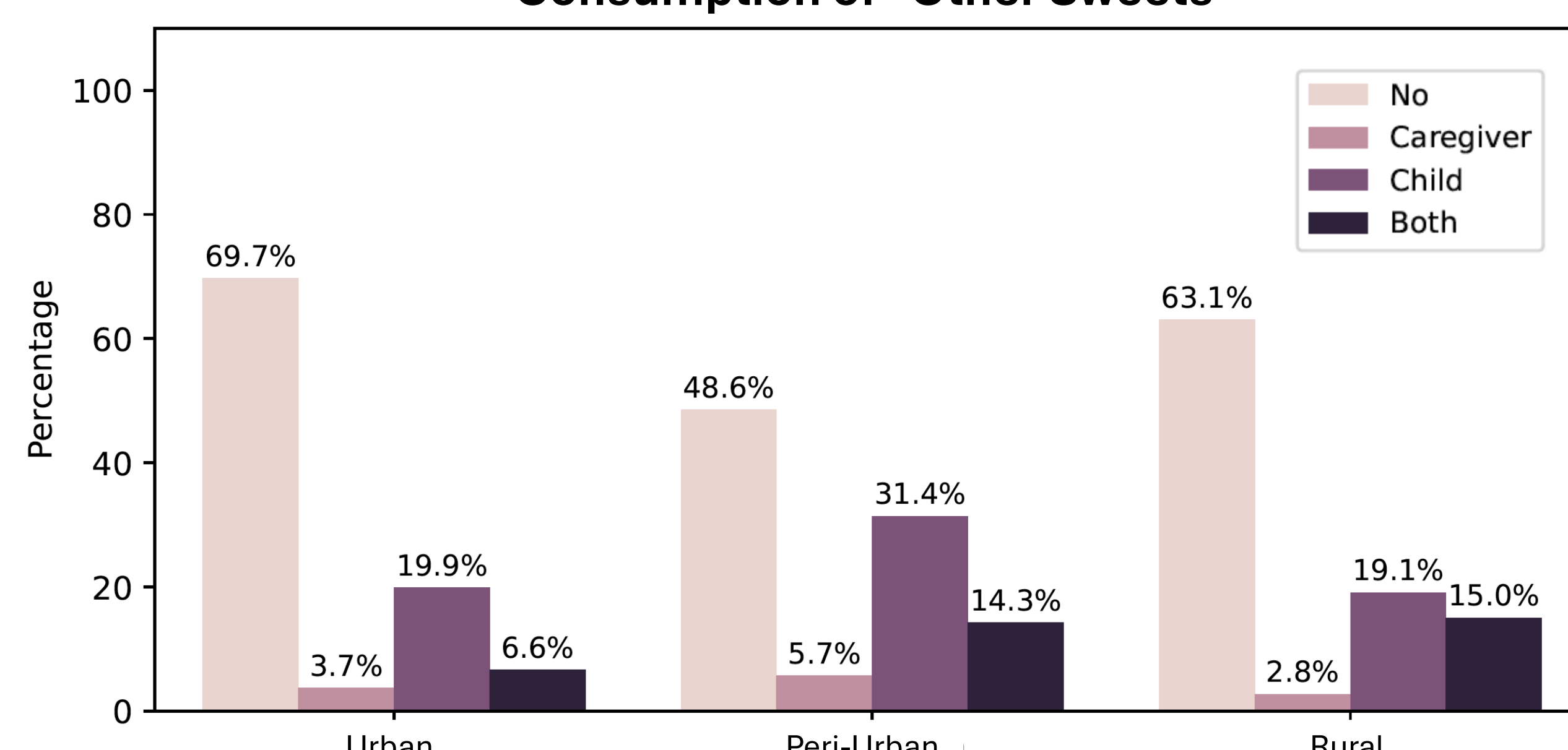


Figure 1: Consumption of the food group "other sweets" (candy, chocolates, ice cream, lot svet, mung bean, pudding, and coconut jellies) across all locations based on the household survey

Perception of "Ultraprocessed Packaged Salty Snacks"

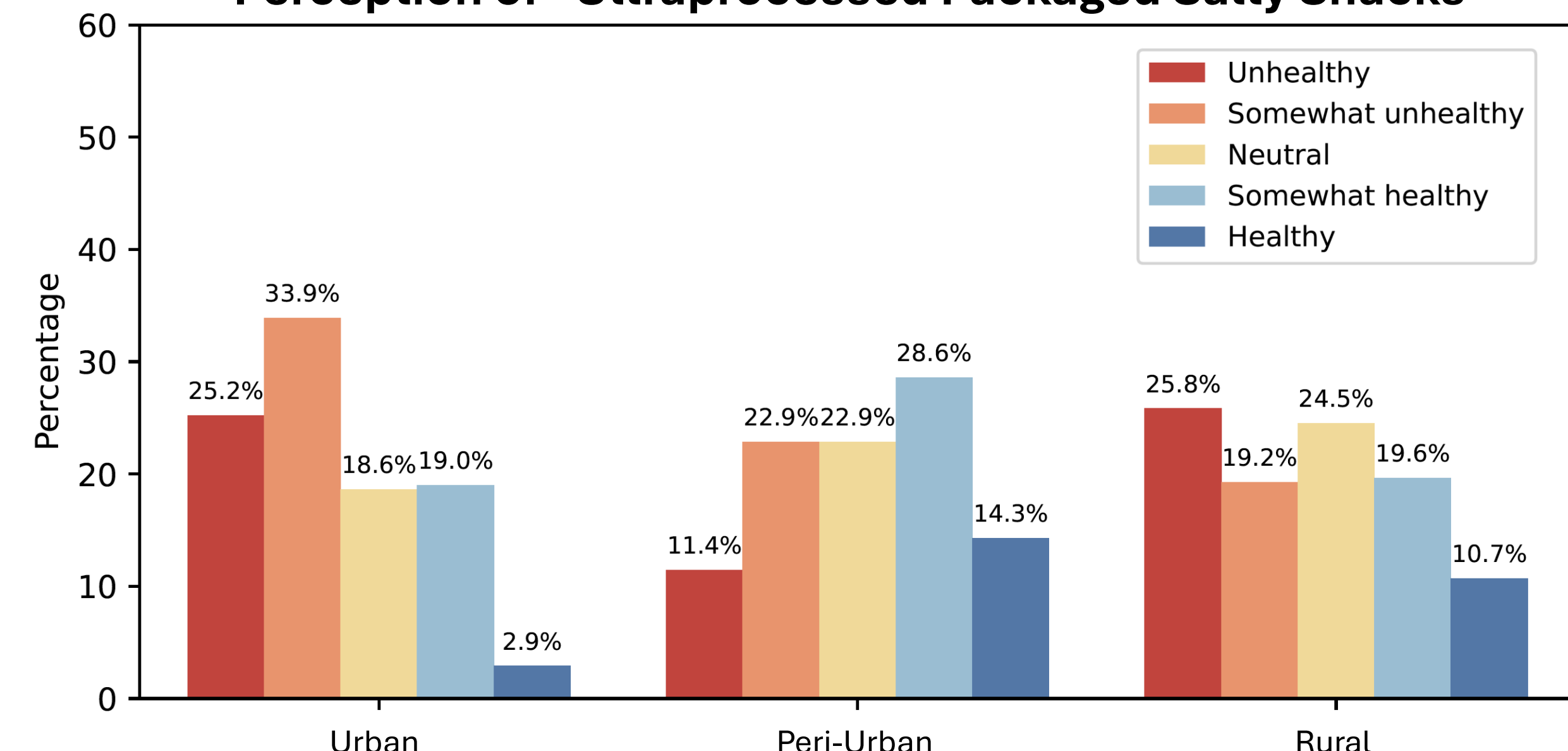


Figure 2: Perception of the unhealthy food group "ultraprocessed packaged salty snacks" (potato chips and shrimp chips) across all locations based on the household survey

Conclusions

- Lower GDR scores in **urban areas** → potential shift toward less diverse, less balanced diets with urbanization
- **Nutrition education** is key to promoting healthy diets, preserving dietary diversity, and preventing NCDs
- Young children need particular attention amid a **rapidly changing food environment**

References

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