Public Perceptions of Sugar Sweetened Beverage Taxes: An Integrative Literature Review

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Public Perceptions of Sugar Sweetened Beverage Taxes: An Integrative Literature Review

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Introduction
- According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2013), noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), primarily diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, cancers, and chronic respiratory diseases are responsible for 63% of deaths worldwide and are largely preventable.
- A prominent factor underlying three of the four aforementioned NCDs is obesity. While increased consumption of both sugar and fat contribute to this epidemic, there is a clear association between dietary sugar consumption and weight gain (WCRF International, 2015).
- Governments across the globe are enacting public health policies, in an attempt to stem the proliferation of obesity and the resulting noncommunicable diseases.
- Both the WCRF International (2015) and WHO (2004) promote the use of taxation, as a proven financial deterrent.

Problem Statement
- In as many places that this tax has had success, it remains difficult to enact on a larger scale. One of the current gaps in the literature is understanding how the adults' opinion affected policy success and implementation.

Methods

Literature Search Strategies
- Four databases were queried: Cumulative Index to Nursing and Health Literature (CINAHL), PubMed, Health Source: Nursing/Academic Edition, and Nursing & Allied Health Database.
- Keywords Used: ((sweeten* OR carbonated OR sugar OR soda) (beverages OR drinks) and tax*) AND (opinion OR perception* OR view* OR impression* OR coverage) for all four databases.
- Inclusion criteria: Literature published in English and peer-reviewed.
- Exclusion criteria: Articles that studied the opinions of children and not adults. I chose this particular exclusion criteria because I was more interested in how the adults' opinion affected policy success and implementation.

Data Analysis
- Upon completion of the initial keyword search in the four databases, I used the inclusion and exclusion criteria to further narrow the search, eliminated any duplicates within and across the databases, and finally reviewed the remaining articles for content.
- Data from the final nine articles was then assembled and critically analyzed to look for important concepts, themes, and results presented within each.

Purpose
- The purpose of this integrative literature review was to examine the public perception of sugar sweetened beverage taxes and to determine what strategies are needed to successfully implement similar policies in the future.

Conceptual Framework
- The social-ecological model for health promotion was selected. It was Originally conceptualized by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979) and later modified by McLeroy, Bibeau, Steckler, & Glanz (1988).

Results

Public Perception
- The lack of widespread success of sugar sweetened beverage tax policies confirms that a public’s opinion of these taxes remains low. One nationwide study of American adults, found support for a tax like this to be as low as 21.6%, and another 26% echoing this minority approval rate.
- However, pockets of America may be seeing an increase in support. In a 2015 telephone survey of adults from the Mid-Atlantic States, 50% of respondents approved of an SSB tax. In addition, the tax seems to garner a significantly higher level of support overseas with approval ratings of 48.5% in France and 54.5% in Australia.

Effective Strategies
1) Message Strategies
- Message strategies were a large part of the public discourse with this topic. One interesting perspective frames SSB tax messaging as a secondary mechanism next to price increases that affects consumer behavior. In general tax arguments were not effective if the tax or revenue purpose was poorly defined, as it lead to misinforming.
- The tax was more favorably perceived if individuals were told the tax revenue went back into the healthcare system would result in a simultaneous drop in the price of other healthy foods.

2) Critical Education Efforts and Message Targeting
- Education efforts and message targeting of particular communities was cited in several studies as critical in order to sway opinion in some of the most affected and antitax sentiment communities, primarily communities of color.
- Unfortunately, several barriers were cited as preventing these efforts including organizing resources, lack of sufficient funding to counteract beverage companies’ sympathetic messaging, lack of formal resources to test and tailor messaging to specific communities, and the need for a much more grassroots approach connecting policymakers with trusted community leaders.

3) Demographic Determinants
- Several demographics were also commonly found to be supportive of an SSB tax and sympathetic to protax messaging. Overwhelmingly, women, younger individuals, those that identified as Democratic, and had a higher education levels consistently showed higher levels of support for an SSB tax.

Conclusion
- Policy interventions such as taxation can be powerful tools to curb behaviors that negatively affect population health, while simultaneously providing incentive to engage in healthier behaviors.
- Interventions such as these are not new, however, the specific policies governing taxation of sugar sweetened beverages are. With their effectiveness hinging on the public’s perception of them this is a topic which could use further examination.