

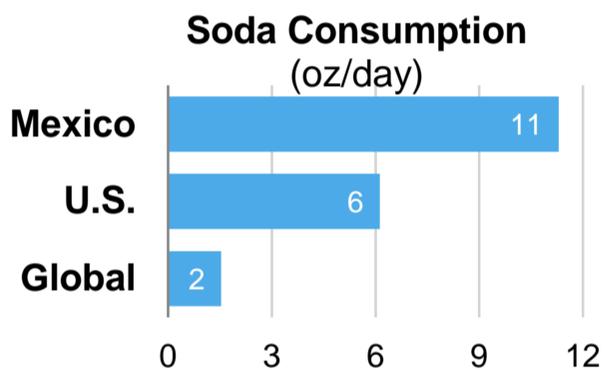
SPARKING A TRANSNATIONAL COLLABORATION ON NUTRITION, POLICY AND ORAL HEALTH

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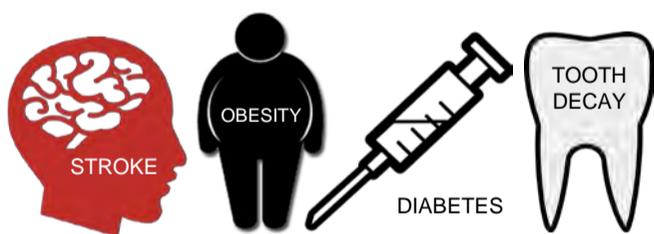
In the past two years, both Mexico and Berkeley, CA implemented excise taxes on sugary beverages in an effort to combat rising diabetes and obesity rates. Yet the topic of tooth decay—one of the first symptoms of excess sugar consumption—has been ignored in policy and media discussions. Additionally, quantitative analyses of both taxes do not fully capture the effects of these taxes on individual consumers. This project established partnerships between researchers and advocates in the U.S. and Mexico to improve qualitative understandings of soda taxation, nutrition, and oral health.

BACKGROUND

Sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs) are a leading source of calories for individuals in Mexico and the U.S., and frequent SSB consumption increases the risk of diabetes, obesity, cardiovascular disease and tooth decay.



While diabetes and obesity dominated much of the public conversation around limiting SSBs, untreated dental caries are actually the number one chronic childhood disease among children, with 37% of children in the U.S. and 74% of Mexican children suffering from caries.



Increased risk of stroke, obesity, diabetes and tooth decay are among the effects of frequent SSB consumption.

In an effort to curb rising obesity rates and prevent negative health outcomes associated with SSBs, both Mexico and Berkeley, CA recently passed 10% taxes on SSBs. Mexico's tax—passed in 2014—decreased SSB purchases by an average of 6% within a year. Berkeley's soda tax (Measure D)—passed in 2015—generates around \$150,000 in revenue for the city each month, but its effects on individual behavior have yet to be studied.

Since parents are often the “nutritional gatekeepers” of the household—deciding what their children and family eat by purchasing foods—we were particularly interested in studying how soda taxes affect them.

METHODS

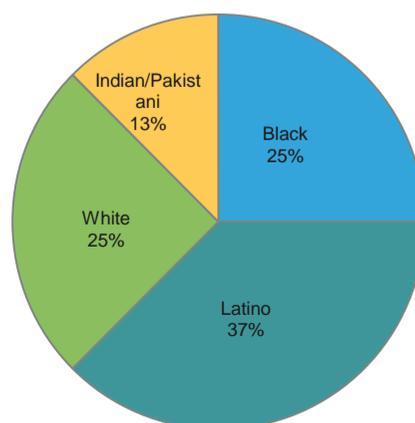
As part of an ongoing study with Dr. Karen Sokal-Gutierrez and Dr. Kris Madsen at the Berkeley School of Public Health, I conducted four focus groups with n=26 parents to better understand how taxation affects consumer knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors around SSBs.

RESULTS

Results from our focus groups showed that parents were aware of the health impacts of SSBs, and were especially worried about diabetes and obesity based on personal experiences with those diseases. Tooth decay was also a top concern due to the pain and aesthetic consequences of caries. Interestingly, participants were skeptical that the soda tax would work, but reported buying less SSBs now that prices had gone up in Berkeley. Furthermore, the majority of participants supported a soda tax.

We are now conducting n=20 individual interviews and distributing online surveys to further explore salient themes and topics that arose in our focus groups.

Given the similarities between California and Mexico in terms of Latino population, SSB consumption, and SSB taxes, I sought to develop a partnership between advocates and researchers in Mexico and Berkeley to further study SSB taxes from a qualitative standpoint, and expand research on tooth decay—one of the first consequences of excess SSB consumption.



Focus Group Participants by Race/Ethnicity

NEXT STEPS

Partnering with El Poder del Consumidor, a Mexican advocacy organization, I am currently:

- ▶ Establishing a bibliography of researchers in the U.S. and Mexico studying SSBs and oral health
- ▶ Conducting focus groups from June 19-26 in Mexico City to explore the salience of oral health compared to other health outcomes related to SSB consumption
- ▶ Bringing university researchers together with advocates and the Mexican National Institute of Public Health in a forum on SSBs and oral health on June 21st, 2016



We hope this partnership will help both countries design better programs and policies to curb SSB consumption and improve health.

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