

EFFECTS OF FISCAL POLICIES ON CHILDREN NUTRIENT INTAKE

SUMMARY

With childhood obesity becoming one of the most dramatic features of the global obesity epidemic, deploying economic tools to address obesity are widely considered. We conducted a study to assess the effects of a hypothetical 20% price increase of sugar-sweetened beverages (SSB) and an equivalent decrease in fruit and vegetable prices, on children nutrient intake in five European countries – Finland, France, Italy, Spain and UK.

We expected that a subsidy of the fruit and vegetable prices would, all else equal, increase consumption of fruit and vegetables by substituting away from other foods. As vegetables have lower levels of energy and fat content, this should translate into a decrease in calorie and fat intakes. However, this effect occurred only in Italy and Finland, -2.1% and -0.5% for calorie and -3.8% and -1.8% for fat, respectively.

We expected that increasing the price of SSB would decrease consumption of SSB in favour of other beverages and food categories, and found that a 20% increase of the SSB prices resulted in much larger effects than either of the fruit and vegetables price subsidy in almost every country. There is an unmistakable fall in calorie (ranging from -1.3% in Finland to -3.0% in Spain) and carbohydrate intakes (-1.50% in Finland to -4.96% in Italy).

These findings therefore clearly suggest that combining these policies would have the desired effect on energy intake, and results suggest that together, these interventions could lead to a decrease in energy intake between 0.5% (UK) and 2.13% (Italy). While encouraging, the findings also highlighted the limited efficiency of such interventions to make a strong difference in the fight of childhood obesity.



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