



SPRING Seminar Series

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Economics, Media and Obesity Prevention

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- Bridging the Gap - - Obesity
 - State and national level
 - Local and community level
 - School and organizational
 - Individual and household
- **Economic Models**
 - Idea is that the policy instrument changes relative costs or benefits, which, in turn, affect behavior choices related to diet and activity
 - Equity considerations: ie food taxes – who benefits vs who bears the costs
 - Health benefits – progressive
 - Tax burden – regressive
 - Subsidies - progressive
 - Its all about the relative costs of energy dense foods
 - By taxing unhealthy foods we could subsidize healthy foods, this would help address the “regressive” argument
- Aspects of cost: Accessibility, Availability, and Affordability
- **The Evidence**
 - Cost*
 - Fruit and vegetable price index, 1990-2008
 - Real price remained relatively constant
 - Fast food and soft drinks have been decreasing in cost in this same time period
 - Availability*
 - Almost ½ of zip codes in the US do not have access to a chain supermarket
 - Even in urban areas, same number do not have access to chain supermarket
 - Extent of availability – how much do you have on a per capita basis? And per land area? (n.b. important to use both in definition of availability)
 - Availability by socioeconomic status and demographics
 - Linked across 28,000 zip codes using Census and Bradley data

- African American communities have ½ the number of chain supermarkets, but more of the other types of stores such as convenience stores and grocery stores
 - Our data showed that there weren't as many fast food restaurants or any type of restaurant in African American communities (unlike statements made in other studies), but higher proportion of fast food restaurants
- Community food environment and child/youth weight outcomes: data linkage
 - Interpreting outlet density does not necessarily capture what's going on in a community (e.g. averages high density and food deserts)
 - Always control for neighborhood income

A summary of what we found ...

- Youth in communities with lower fruit and beverage prices have more frequent fruit and vegetable consumption and lower BMI
- Youth in communities with lower fast food prices have less frequent fruit and veg consumption, higher BMI and are more likely to be overweight
- Youth in top of BMI distribution are more price sensitive, which is good because impact of fast food and f&v prices is high

Does this relation exist using longitudinal data?

- Fast food prices and BMI – price is driving fast food consumption, not number of restaurants
- Contextual factors on child BMI percentile by family income
 - In low income families, greater supermarket availability is related to a lower weight outcome
- Of the three longitudinal data sets on these relations, we are finding similar results.
 - Price elasticities of child BMI by SES – price sensitivity significant in low income quintile

Summary

- Fiscal food pricing policies have modest but measurable effects, on avg, on the wt outcomes of children and youth
- Greater price sensitivity among
 - Low income children
 - C and y with lower educated mothers
 - Youths who are in the upper tail of the BMI distribution
- Improve access to supermarkets found to be most important

Food Product Advertising

- For children, ad exposure is greatest for cereal 27.6%, followed by fast food, and then other products
- For teens, ad exposure is greatest for fast food 23%, cereal 12%, and then other products
- Nutritional content of food products on tv by children aged 2 – 11
 - Almost 98% of foods were either high fat, sugar, and sodium
- Looking at changes over time, 2003-2007
 - Trends in exposure to food ads per day for children and adolescents by age

- Important to note that the BBB self-reg pledges went into effect in 2007**
- Ad exposure went down slightly for children 2-5 and 6 – 11, but increased for teens
- There has been an increase in fast food advertising, a decrease in snacks and sweets, and beverages
- Why are ads for fruit drinks and regular soft drinks going down?
 - Diet soft drink ads went up, and bottled water went up
 - Diet soft drinks qualifies as a better for you product, for children under 12
- Fast food companies, McDonalds and Burger King, part of consortium
 - Decrease in 2-5 year olds, but increase in 6-11 year olds
 - Companies are shifting their ads to child-oriented shows, but with older audience
- KFC, Sonic, Subway, and Taco Bell, there were increases in ads between 2003-2007 among all age groups from children and youth
 - Increase is greater among African American youth

Policy Landscape – Subsidies

- Food in the US is subsidized for low income individuals and families through a number of programs, e.g. food stamps, WIC, NSLP, etc.
- Recently, food subsidies are directed at the consumer for f&v through WIC program
- California “healthy purchase” pilot program where for each dollar of food stamps spent of fresh food, participants are subsidized a portion of the cost

Taxes

- Food taxes are usually for general revenues, not public health interventions
- Food taxes are currently imposed on select foods in the US, e.g. soda, sweets, but tax rate is very low
- 33 states in the US tax soda, and the range is 0-7%
- State sales tax rates for restaurants, sodas and snacks, 1997-2009, have been fairly flat

Advertising

- No formal regulations in place in the US
- CFBAI – self regulation by the industry
 - No uniform nutritional standards
 - No uniform definition of child programming

Discussion

- We aren’t doing much in terms of fiscal pricing interventions...
 - Need evaluations of programs that subsidize healthy foods – link to weight outcomes
 - We have found limited associations between soda taxes and weight outcomes - - should not expect to find large effects based on low tax rates
 - Sales v. excise tax, excise tax is the way to go so that it hits the shelf price
 - Excise tax would apply to wherever products are purchased/sold

- Soda taxes would apply to food stamp users, because right now food stamp users are exempt
- Is it time for regulatory action for food advertising? Literature suggests there has been little improvement through self-regulatory pledges.

Resources:

ImpactTeen
www.imacpteen.com

Bridging the Gap
www.bridgingthegapresearch.org

Economic, Lifestyle and Social Influences on Obesity
www.impactteen.org/obesity

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