Reviewer's report

Title: Studying the health outcomes of fiscal interventions (taxes and subsidies) on food and beverages in countries of different income classifications; a systematic review

Version: 1 Date: 13 May 2015

Reviewer: Daniel Taber

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Major Compulsory Revisions

1. I like the premise of the study – i.e., pointing out the lack of evidence on taxes/subsidies from low-income countries, and why evidence from high-income countries may not translate. With that said, I would like to see the authors dig into this idea a little deeper. Currently, they note the absence of studies from LI countries but don’t go far beyond that. The Discussion would be a great opportunity to dig into questions such as:

   • “Would these results from HI countries translate to LI countries? Why or why not?”
   • “How do the determinants of diet/obesity compare in LI versus HI countries? Is that likely to change the effectiveness of FI?”
   • “Are subsidies more likely to work than taxes in LI countries, or vice versa?”

Even if the authors cannot answer all these questions, the Discussion would be much stronger if they incorporated them. In the current version, the Discussion mostly just repeats the Results.

2. I was a little confused by the organization of Results. The sub-sections overlap quite a bit; several sections include anthropometry as an outcome, which makes it difficult to follow the overall summary of anthropometry studies. Since the whole purpose of the study is to compare results by income classification, I would suggest organizing the Results in that way, as they are in the Tables.

Minor Essential Revisions

3. Why did the study by Fletcher et al. (Reference #33) count as “grey literature”?

4. On page 10, I’m not sure if the authors intended to say “malnutrition is not a concern” in LI countries. It may be a typo or the sentence may need to be structured differently, because currently it comes across as “malnutrition is not a problem in LI countries.”

5. Minor typos or grammatical errors:
   • The second sentence on Page 3 includes an extra period
• Page 4, “Types of Interventions”: The 2nd sentence needs to be fixed (“…as were emergency flood services were…”)

• The formatting of sub-sections headlines is a little confusing – e.g., on Page 7, “Peer-reviewed literature” is italicized but “Grey literature” is italicized and in bold.

• The first row of Table 1 lists the outcome measure under “outcome data source”

Discretionary Revision

6. I suggest dropping the Howard and Prakash study (#46) because the National School Lunch Program is very different from taxes/subsidies, as it does not subsidize any particular food/beverage product. Furthermore, there have been numerous studies on the NSLP and diet/obesity in the U.S. If the authors wanted to include the Howard and Prakash study, they should include several other NSLP studies, many of which had completely different results.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests