Reviewer’s report

Title: Reductions in sugar sales from soft drinks in the UK from 2015-2018

Version: 2 Date: 27 Oct 2019

Reviewer: Barry Popkin

Reviewer's report:

Overview: The author made several solid changes but still sticks with noting there is a 30% reduction in sugar sales when the per capita reduction is greatly smaller. This over exaggeration of the effect is not appropriate for a solid medical journal. In addition, it ascribes a greater impact to the voluntary push in 2015 when the SDIL was announced in 2016 to truly push reformulation and much of the change in reformulation occurred after 2016. There are literally hundreds of studies, some from the UK and many from other OECD countries to show that voluntary pledges have not worked or been mainly ineffective. This young author needs to shift some of her writing to address these points and not ascribe so much of an effect to the one-year voluntary phase. So, to be specific:

1. The author in the abstract must focus on the announcement/implementation of the SDIL.

2. Focus on sugar sales per capita and not total volume which is very misleading. And this highlights then the important public health impact instead of a hard-to-interpret and greatly misleading total volume of sugar sales. The discussion and conclusion must highlight the per capita changes, and this should be the major results component.

3. The author must stop the focus just on % change but rather on absolute change. You found a 4.7-gram reduction in sugar in grams/per capita and this is the true public health impact of what you show. This is significant when we think of a population distribution shift and is really the mean change you see when we want to consider health impact.

4. Euromonitor has one major flaw you do not note. It focuses only on chain retail stores and away-from-home eateries. It misses sales from single bars, restaurants, stores, etc. This is why you must discuss the trends as being pretty realistic, but the levels are an underestimate.
5. Focus on per capita [in absolute and relative terms] in the short discussion intro paragraph and then the final implications.

6. The rate of change will always grow if the sugar/capita declines and you see the same absolute change. But in public health terms did the trend in the absolute impact on grams of sales/capita change.

You focus far too much on relative change when we want to understand just how will this impact health. Please make these changes to give the public and medical worlds a better sense of the impact of these changes in terms of total diet and needed changes to impact NCDs and obesity far more. This is significant but you are truly overstating the impact.

Are the methods appropriate and well described?
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

No

Does the work include the necessary controls?
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

No

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