Can soda tax prevent obesity essay

Business, Industries

Soda Tax Is Not the Solution There has been a growing concern towards the issue of obesity and efforts were made by governmental and non-governmental organizations to tackle this health problem. New York City's proposal for labeling regulations for the food and beverage industry marked the start of government intervention into the market to fight obesity, and many states soon followed suit (Brownell et al. , 2012, p. 384). A recent tax proposal on sugary beverages has caused uproar among the beverage industry because this tax, unlike the previous labeling regulations, is targeted directly towards the beverage industry.

It is difficult to implement a tax on sugar-sweetened beverages because some people oppose it on the grounds of how much of a paternal role the government should play in the people's lives. Presently, U. S. state governments are debating whether the 1% per once tax on soda and other sugary beverages can effectively combat obesity. It would be a serious mistake to impose a tax on sugar-sweetened beverage because sugar-sweetened beverage is not the main cause of obesity, the tax wrongly attributes a large portion of responsibility of obesity to the consumers, and the tax cannot ensure a decline in consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages.

Before taxing the sugar-sweetened beverages, there is a need to establish a direct link between sugar consumption and obesity. It is important to decide whether decreasing sugar consumption will decrease the obesity rate. According to Dr. Bray from Harvard Medical School, high-fructose corn syrup (HFCS) has about 40% of market share in caloric sweeteners used in the United States (as cited in Bocarsly et al. , 2010, p. 101). Due to HFCS's large

market share, any effects of HFCS will have a significant impact on the consumers.

Bocarsly et al. 2010) conducted an experiment on the effects of consuming HFCS on male and female rats for 6 to 7 months, and the results indicate abnormal weight gain of the rats (p. 105). While this experiment justifies the effects of a strict HFCS diet on animals, but it did not take the diet proportions into account. While attempting to reduce sugar consumption by imposing tax on sugar-sweetened beverages, the beverage industry will find an alternative way to compensate for the reduced sugar level in order to market their products to the public. For instance, a member of the Center of Science in the Public Interest, Wootan, says McDonalds " has a pretty good sugar standard but no sodium standard, so that lets in more salty burgers and fries" (cited in Mantel, 2010, p.

806). Therefore, it is unjust to tax sugar-sweetened beverages but not on other unhealthy food. Besides that, adolescents and adults are capable of making responsible decision regarding their diet and they do not need any legislation such as a beverage tax to help them do so. Brownell et al. 2010) shows a gradual decline in the number of cases of driving without seat belt, driving under alcohol influence, riding with a drunk driver, and practicing unsafe sex (p.

381). These incidents can be used as in indicator of the level of personal responsibility the adolescents possess, and the decline of such cases implies that the adolescents are getting more responsible. Brownell et al. (2010)

respects the individuals' right to their personal health and too recognize the importance of government intervention to solve the problem (p. 382).

Instead of guiding the citizens, a tax on sugar-sweetened beverages is a way of dictating how the consumers should behave. Rather than attempting to implement taxes, Brownell et al. (2010) suggests that the government to be more of a facilitator than a parental figure by improving the accessibility of healthy food (p. 383). This action corresponds to the " optimal defaults" used by countries such as Austria and France to its citizens to be organ donors, and it showed promising results in influencing personal decision towards the intended outcome (Brownell et al. 2010, p. 383).

Additionally, the proposed 1% per once tax does not guarantee a reduction of the demand of sugar-sweetened beverages. Reducing consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages is not as easy as raising the price. The effectiveness of any product taxes depends heavily on the " price elasticity of demand" (Madore, 2007), or in other words, the sensitivity of consumer behavior towards the price change (p. 3). It is unjust to assume that the consumers will definitely respond to the increase in price. Up to January 8, 2007, there are " no analytic papers assessing the potential impact of economic instruments promoting physical activity" (Madore, 2007), as most of the studies are centered on healthy eating (p.

3). Moreover, related analysis about tax and its effects have underlying assumptions about the sensitivity of consumers towards the price change (Mantel, 2010b, p. 799). To investigate on the price elasticity of sugar-sweetened beverages, Chouinard et al. have conducted a study on the effect

of fat taxes on dairy oods as a comparison to the current sugar tax issue, as both are targeted to reduce obesity rates. The data indicate that the demand for dairy products is inelastic, and the tax resulted “ in less than a 1 percent reduction in average fat consumption” (Chouinard et al. , 2006, p. 2).

This result by Chouinard et al. affirms Madore’s (2007) point stating there are an abundance of studies showing the correlation between taxation and consumption, but seldom with an established cause and effect relationship between the two (p. 3). This means that a tax on sugar-sweetened beverage might not cause consumption to drop.

In short, there is no need to tax implement tax on sugar-sweetened beverages as it is still unclear whether such tax will change consumption level or not. Critics of this proposal point out that obesity is a disease that is more prevalent among the poor than the rich, and the regressive nature of the tax could help reduce obesity by affecting the poorer consumers more than the richer consumers. However, the results of a study conducted by Wang, the chairman of the Medical Department at the U. S.

Department of Energy’s Brookhaven National Laboratory, and other researches have brought doubt to the efficiency of the regressive tax. In an interview by Mantel (2010a), Wang claims to have discovered that obese people have similar neurological changes in the brain as drug addicts and alcoholics (p. 808). This “ addiction” means that consumers will less likely respond to the small price hike of sugar-sweetened beverages.

The tax is then translated into an extra burden to the poor because that tax might not affect their consumption behavior. A better way to overcome obesity is through a more gradual method to ameliorate the impact on the poor. For instance, Madore (2007) suggests that instead of implementing tax, promoting healthy foods through subsidy can also reduce obesity as it bypasses the " potential regressive effects of taxation" (p. 4). Rogers (2012), a writer for Contra Coasta Times, interviewed a 12 year-old named Marco Navaro, and he said he would continue buying soda even if the price hiked from 50 cents to a dollar (p. 1A). Medical results and personal accounts show that the tax might not be as effective as the tax proponents claim to be, and having a tax could have little implications on the demand of sugar-sweetened beverages.

The tax on sugar-sweetened beverages has the intention of solving the obesity problem. However, it is not the smartest way as it impedes economic freedom, prevents people from taking personal responsibility for their decision, and the tax might not be effective at all. The consumers should have a free will to make their purchases, and they are responsible enough to make economic decisions after considering the consequences that come along with them. Indeed, placing the 1% per ounce tax on sugar-sweetened beverages might appear to be the simpler choice, but meddling with the free market economy is not always a wise plan.

As proven, the " fat tax" on dairy products failed to significantly reduce consumption (Chouinard et al. , 2006). Therefore, the proper solution is not through taxing, but rather a through gradual transformation of the society's

eating and living habits in order to reduce obesity rates. References

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