

Establishing transnational linkages to reduce sugary drink consumption and improve oral health

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Common sugar-sweetened beverages sold in Mexico

Mexico and The United States

Top Rates of Sugar Consumption and Sugar-Related Deaths

Mexico and the United States are among the world's top consumers of sugary drinks. Mexicans consume an average of 11.3oz of Coca Cola per day, and individuals in the U.S.A. consume an average of 6.12oz per day, compared to the world average of 1.53oz per day. Among Mexicans, this adds up to an extra 67 cups of sugar, or 51,791 extra calories per year, and contributes to an additional 24,000 deaths each year.

In an effort to curb sugar consumption and decrease

the burden of disease associated with sugary drinks, both Mexico and Berkeley, CA implemented excise taxes on sugary beverages in 2014 and 2015, respectively. However, until now these taxes have focused on combating diabetes and obesity, and have only been studied from quantitative perspectives. This project established partnerships between researchers and advocates in the U.S. and Mexico to improve qualitative understandings of soda taxation, nutrition, and oral health.

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Tara Benesch discusses oral health at the INSP in Cuernavaca, Morelos

National Institute for Public Health

At the National Institute of Public Health (INSP) in Cuernavaca, Morelos, GFI Fellow Tara Benesch led a seminar on the oral health impacts of sugary drinks, and the importance of including dental health in future policy decisions that limit sugar consumption. The seminar was preceded by a discussion with Dr. Juan Rivera, co-coordinator of the Mexican National Nutrition and Health Survey and co-editor of [Obesity in Mexico: Recommendations for State Policy](#). Addressing Dr. Rivera, together with his students and colleagues, Tara increased awareness of the direct costs of poor oral health, and established connections with research teams at the INSP that are linking the dental health and public health communities. In the future, we hope that dental health will be included in national nutritional surveys in Mexico.

Opportunities for Interdisciplinary Academic Exchange

With the recent passage of “soda taxes” in both Mexico and Berkeley, California, there are now a variety of new opportunities to explore the connection between sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs), public policy, and health. Much of the media conversation related to SSB taxes has centered on preventing diabetes and obesity, but oral health—the world’s most prevalent disease as well as an early indicator of excess sugar consumption—has been largely ignored. Given the fact that poor oral health can contribute to malnutrition, pain, and a variety of other conditions, it is important to bring dental health into the conversation about SSBs and taxation policies.

In order to raise awareness among researchers, advocates and the media about the connections between SSBs and dental health/decay, GFI fellow and Joint Medical Program student Tara Benesch and McNair Scholar Ana Ibarra traveled to Mexico to present at a variety of academic institutions

and plant seeds for future partnerships between Mexican institutions and the University of California system.

Presentations included a seminar at the National Institute for Public Health (INSP) in Cuernavaca, Morelos (20 people in attendance and 35 streaming online), and talks at the Iberoamerican University, members of the Nutritional Health Alliance, and El Poder del Consumidor. While student strikes prevented Benesch and Ibarra from giving a talk at the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana (UAM), they were able to establish partnerships at UAM, the Iberoamerican University, and INSP, and identify key researchers and teams working in the fields of oral health, nutrition, and public health. Such partnerships pave the way for future forums spanning nutrition, dentistry, and oral health, and will enable collaboration across campuses to research the effects of SSBs and sugar taxes on oral health.

Nutrition, Public Health, and Dentistry: Future Partnerships and Goals

Through meetings with Mexican academics working on nutrition and obesity prevention, Ms. Benesch and Ms. Ibarra were able to draw links and build synergies between researchers interested in improving public health from a variety of angles. In order to integrate oral health into these conversations, the following areas for future research and collaboration were identified:

- a) Integrating oral health measures into health interventions currently being provided by the Iberoamerican

University in partnership with the pueblo Mazahua

- b) Research opportunities at the INSP focusing on cost and prevalence of oral health problems in Mexico
- c) Summer internship and research opportunities at the Iberoamerican University or INSP
- d) Collaboration between dental health researchers at the INSP and UCSF



Parent Focus Groups in Mexico City, D.F.

Advocacy and Outreach

Understanding How Public Policies Shape Individual and Organizational Understandings of Sugary Drinks and Health

Meetings with Advocates Create Possibilities for New Strategic Partnerships

The week began with an informal meeting with El Poder del Consumidor (EPC), an advocacy organization based in Mexico City and a key player in the nationwide fight against sugary drinks in Mexico. Following the kick-off presentation on June 20th, GFI fellow Tara Benesch and McNair Scholar Ana Ibarra worked with EPC to provide inputs and insights for future communications materials related to sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs) and health, drafted a bibliography of key researchers and seminal articles on the health effects of SSBs, and helped create a focus group guide to better understand Mexican mothers' perceptions of SSBs, their health effects, and taxation. Following the focus groups, Ms. Benesch and Ms. Ibarra spearheaded the analysis of the focus groups, preparing a presentation to be used in designing future advocacy campaigns. Tara Benesch will continue to collaborate with EPC to create an infographic and plan a forum on SSBs and oral health in the future. In addition to work with EPC, Benesch and Ibarra presented at the Alliance for Nutritional Health, a group of 29 NGOs collaborating to improve nutrition

and end malnutrition in Mexico. This presentation increased awareness of dental health as a public health issue, promoted the idea that Alliance members incorporate dental health concerns across their policy promotion efforts, and will facilitate conversations between the Alliance and EPC in the future.

Focus Groups Illuminate Parent Perceptions of Sugary Drinks, Health, and Taxation

At El Poder del Consumidor, UC Berkeley students Tara Benesch and Ana Ibarra were able to replicate a study that they had done with Berkeley parents following Measure D's implementation. This study, featuring focus groups with low- and middle-income mothers, examined perceptions of SSBs, taxation, and oral health, and used popular media campaigns to explore salient health effects of SSBs. Results from these focus groups will inform future communications campaigns released by the Alliance for Nutritional Health, and will assist researchers in Mexico and Berkeley in understanding how to design campaigns and policies to reduce SSB consumption.

Next Steps: Binational Partnerships to Confront an International Problem

Tackling Sugar Consumption Through Interdisciplinary Research and Advocacy

Goals Realized:

- Identifying key international scholars and advocates from the dental health community, as well as Mexican scholars and professional associations, working on or concerned about dental health/dental decay and SSBs, through research, clinical work, advocacy and/or community intervention models.
- Cultivating opportunities for collaboration between academic institutions in Mexico (UAM, Iberoamerican University, INSP) and UC Berkeley (School of Public Health, Berkeley Food Institute and Global Food Initiative Fellows)
- Creating an infographic about oral health to be used in future promotional materials and social media by El Poder del Consumidor and Alliance for Nutritional Health
- Providing academic and advocacy organizations with evidence-based reasons to include oral health in discussions of public health and nutrition

Next Steps:

- Forum on oral health, nutrition, and SSBs in Mexico
- Partnership between UC Berkeley, Iberoamerican University, and pueblo Mazahua to improve oral health of indigenous population
- Research opportunities for UC Berkeley students at the INSP studying cost and prevalence of tooth decay in Mexico
- Translating research about the oral health consequences of SSBs into policies to reduce SSB consumption



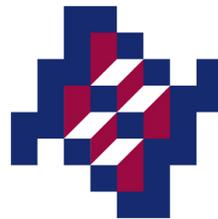
Global Food Initiative Scholar Tara Benesch and McNair Scholar Ana Ibarra meet with advocates from the Nutritional Health Alliance and El Poder del Consumidor in Mexico

Partnerships and Collaborators

We would like to thank the following organizations for helping foster this international collaboration



Global Food Initiative
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA



Instituto Nacional de Salud Pública

JMP Joint Medical Program
University of California Berkeley
University of California at San Francisco



UC Berkeley School of Public Health



EL PODER DEL CONSUMIDOR



alianza por la salud alimentaria



Developing Leaders
Through Graduate Education

