Essay Rewrite

Week 1, Term 3

What are the most effective solutions to the obesity crisis?

In recent years, there has been extensive consideration to the serious problem of obesity. Its negative effects, as mentioned in the lecture1, are generally without doubt, yet there are huge controversies on the most effective solutions. Some, such as Soares (2016), suggest imposing heavy taxes on unhealthy food, such as sugar drinks, saturated fat and confectionery. Others claim that the effect of taxes is far from satisfactory2. This essay will argue that, despite some negative influence, there are three most effective solutions to the obesity crisis which are taxes, education, and the combination of more exercise and less energy intake.

The first most effective3 solution of obesity is considered to be taxes on unhealthy food. Snowdon (2016) argues that tax could increase the price of unhealthy commodities, which would lead to a decrease in demand, and subsequently reduce the level of obesity. This is exemplified in the work undertaken by the Mexico government[,] which adds 1 peso tax on every liter of soda drinks (Soares, 2016). The obesity rate, as mentioned in the lecture, was 32% before the tax was added, and it has4 declined by as much as 12% by 2014 (ibid). Therefore, the fiscal policy of tax could be considered as an effective measure to reduce obesity. However, two objections have been suggested to this policy. CA1 Firstly, Snowdon (2016) has claimed that taxes on food, a biological necessity, cannot be vastly high, and therefore the tax policy mostly violence hurts/affects the poor since they spend a much higher proportion of their income on food, particularly unhealthy food5 and drinks[,] which are normally cheaper, but also6, they are more sensible sensitive to small price changes. In that case, opponents suppose that taxes on unhealthy food increase people’s economic pressures and further contribute to the wealth inequality. R1Nevertheless, while tax alone might sometimes seem to worsen the economic condition of poor people, that criticism overlooks the combination between7 tax and other policies, such as subsidies and the provision of merit goods. Soares (2016) points out that all the revenues from taxes would be reinvested into public health care[,] which could mainly benefit the poor. In addition, the state subsidies on healthy products makes them more available for people with lower incomes (Gagnon & Freudenberg, 2012). Therefore, the combination of various policies is capable of reducing the obesity rate without oppressing the poor. CA2 The second objection is the uncertainty of food suppliers’ behaviour. Cawley and Frisvold (2015, cited in Snowdon, 2016) have suggested that some companies are able to absorb some or even all of the tax to keep the prices stable, and that behaviour is believed to be common under heavy market competitions. As a result, the tax policy, as they have claimed, could8 not have any influence on the consumption side. Furthermore, since the profit per product decreases, critics have even suggested that those companies are likely to expand supply to compensate their losing profit9, which makes the obesity deteriorate10.R2 However, while that objection illustrates one of the possible reactions of food suppliers based on the market structure of perfect competition, it still oversimplified the complexity of market mechanism. Gagnon and Freudenberg (2012) argue that healthier businesses with the support of government policies are more competitive in free markets, because they could can lower their price even below their cost, which is believed to be not possible without subsidies. Moreover, it is generally accepted that it might be feasible for companies to sacrifice their profit to maintain relative low prices in the short run, but the long-run revenue would not be sufficient to cover its cost. Therefore, since the tax could reduce the demand for unhealthy food, it is deemed to be11 an effective solution to obesity.

The second effective solution to obesity is the education on a healthy diet. Gagnon and Freudenberg (2012) point out that one of the main reasons young children are easily to become the target of unhealthy food is likely to be that they lack knowledge about what makes a healthy diet. Besides, based on the low quality of their children's packed lunches, Evans (2016) argues that parents also know little about the basic elements of healthy diets. Therefore, it is believed that education on healthy eating habits is necessary and it is expected to serve as an effective solution to obesity. One of the most powerful methods, as Luo (2015) suggests, is to use simple language to explain complex concepts, such as sustainability, biodiversity and micronutrients. For example, schools could encourage students to “eat a rainbow everyday” to ensure their diets contain various types of healthy food (ibid). In that way, education helps to let people be aware of those foods that could contribute to their health, and subsequently get rid of12 those unhealthy foods. However, some people, such as Jolly (2011), claims that the influence on children from school education might not be able to compete with the influence from junk food advertisements through television, films and or even video games. Opponents use an experiment (cited in Harvard School of Public Health, 2016) to present the huge effect of advertisements, in which children who watch cartoons with food advertisement would eat 45% more snack food. Notwithstanding, that criticism overlooks government’s regulation on unhealthy food advertisements, since the possible negative effects of unhealthy food advertisements have also been noticed by the government. Under the influence of state’s IOM report, unhealthy food oligopolies, such as Coca Cola and McDonald’s, pledge to reduce its their advertisements targeting at children under 12 (ibid). Besides, Oliver (2015) points out that promotional activities, such as buy-one-and-get-one-free, would be heavily restricted, which was also mentioned in the lecture13. Consequently, the combination of education on healthy food and regulation on unhealthy food advertising is expected to be an effective solution to the obesity crisis. However, the way to regulate advertisements has itself been criticized by opponents, such as Jolly (2011), who suggest that all the information about products has been provided to consumers without false? to help them make their own choice. Thus, for Jolly, the regulation on advertising is against the fundamental theory of liberalism. Because as one of the most influential liberals, J. S. Mill (cited in Jolly, 2011) claimsed that there should be as much individual freedom in any society as is compatible with the freedom of others. Since advertising is not generally considered as an invasion of individual freedom, opponents claim that the restrictions on advertisements are unjust in a liberal society14. Nonetheless, although that liberal statement could be impressive at first glance, that the objection is based on a the questionable assumption that the problem of obesity could be limited within individual realm15. [LINK] Snowdon (2016) claims that obesity would also create negative externalities to the society. For instance, it was mentioned in the lecture that roughly 10 billion pounds are spent by the NHS to solve obesity-related diseases. For the reason that most of the government spending comes from taxes, it is reasonable to argue that the whole society, including those who are not suffering obesity, have to pay for the negative consequence of obesity. In this case, having unhealthy food and drinks is not only an individual choice, but indeed could be deemed as an invasion intrusion to others, which legitimates the government’s intervention in this sphere. Furthermore, Soares (2016) claims that people could not think critically when facing marketing strategies that food companies spend billions of dollars on, and thus the choice they make could be irrational and could not represent their true will, whereas the liberal principle of individual autonomy is based on people’s ability of making rational choice. Thus, it remains to be questionable that whether those liberalism theories could be applied on the case of unhealthy food advertisement. Therefore, providing education on healthy diet could be considered as an effective solution to the spreading obesity, since it teaches people what types of food could benefit their health.

The third effective solution could be considered as a combination of regular exercise and less calories intake, because it helps to increase the energy output and decrease its input (Harvard School of Public Health, 2014). Apropos of exercise, people are not as active as before due to advanced technology as well as the improving transportation system (ibid). Therefore, measures suggested in the lecture to encourage exercise, such as provideing people with access to sport space, suggested in the lecture, could help to solve the problem of obesity. However, opponents, such as Malhotra et al (2015), have supposed16 that there seems to be no connection between physical activity and weight loss. They have suggested that it is those food companies who deliberately make people believe they17 can loss weight by exercising, so that more food consumption is acceptable (ibid). Notwithstanding, although the argument developed by Malhotra et al could be a possible explanation of food companies’ behavior, that criticism does not provide any evidence to show the irrelevantce of exercise and weight loss. In fact, the Harvard School of Public Health (2014), generally believed as18 a more reliable institution, claim that exercise for more than or equal to19 two hours and a half hours does contribute to weight control. It was also mentioned in the lecture that even 10 minutes of walking could help to prevent obesity-related diseases. Therefore, even though disagreements do exist, enough exercise is expected to be a source of losing weight, unless opponents could provide further evidence and statistics to support their claim. Regarding the second component of this solution20, energy intake, Marteau et al (2015) argue that one possible reason for people’s superabundant calories intake is that people are accustomed to eating and drinking from larger portions, because food portions which people encounter in markets have the ability to shape their sense of norms for the standard of appropriate size. Therefore, banning large portions could be21 deemed as a method to reduce people’s calories intake. However, critics have suggested that regulations on portion size might not be accepted by consumers22 who could save money on large portions (ibid). A newspaper survey was used by opponents to show that 60% of the US residents opposed the elimination of portions larger than 16 ounces (ibid). Nevertheless, while that number seems to be impressive by first look, it23 was conducted in 2012. Whereas, a more recent survey in 2015 points out that as much as 53.5% of US residents could accept that ban, increased by 33.75% from 40% (ibid). Although surveys are sometimes seen as unscientific, because they only cover people’s opinions, it is very relevant in this case to show people’s acceptability24 towards government regulation. Therefore, since the combination of more exercise and less energy intake could reduce the risk of obesity, it seems to be an effective solution.

In conclusion, taxes, education and the combination of exercise and less calories intake25 are, on balance, three of the most effective solutions to the obesity crisis. Because education on healthy dietary provides people information about food which is encouraged to eat, and taxes on junk food ensure a higher cost of eating unhealthy food, people would be more likely to reduce their consumption of sugary drinks, saturated fat and confectionery. When those two solutions are considered alongside the encouragement of exercise and the regulation on portion size, it is compelling to argue that the obesity crisis is possible be solved. Further research needs to be conducted into the relation between obesity and enough sleep levels (Boseley, 2017). Only if every possible solution has been tried with full effort, can the obesity crisis be solved.

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