The impact of a tax on sugar-sweetened beverages according to socio-economic position: a systematic review of the evidence

While it has been noted that the prevalence of obesity seems to follow a socio-economic pattern, few obesity prevention interventions are evaluated according to their impact across socio-economic groups. A sugar-sweetened beverage tax has been flagged as a recommended regulatory approach to address population weight gain. Individuals from lower socio-economic status typically consume a higher proportion of sugar-sweetened beverages than people from high socio-economic status. Given the demand price elasticity of these drinks, it has been estimated that a 10% tax on sugar-sweetened beverages could lead to an 8-10% reduction in the purchase of these beverages. This systematic review aims to review the literature for studies conducted in high-income countries that examined the effect on an increase in the price of sugar-sweetened beverages on purchase or consumption and/or weight outcomes based on socio-economic status indicators.

The review highlights that a tax on sugar-sweetened beverages will likely lead to improvements in population weight of a similar or greater magnitude for lower socio-economic groups compared to higher socio-economic groups. The current evidence suggests that a tax on sugar-sweetened beverages is likely to be an effective policy to reduce sugar-sweetened beverage consumption.