

Title:

Let Them Eat Fruit (or Vegetables), But How?

SUMMARY**Background**

Fruit and vegetable (FV) intake has been linked to improvements in physical and psychological well-being, but cost may be a possible deterrent to consumption, especially in developing countries. A few studies have examined the effect of price on FV consumption. A few studies used randomized experiments and found that people assigned to free FV or discounted FV consumed more FV than controls. Some cross-country studies using prices in local supermarkets and individual FV consumption and income data showed that countries with higher FV price per average income was associated with lower FV consumption. In order to encourage people to increase FV consumption, it is important to understand what factors increase FV consumption.

Methods

Using two waves of longitudinal data collected from N=2,500 respondents from a large urban area in South Africa, we examined the relationship between the respondent's FV intake and various factors related to FV consumption. Specifically, we measured household income per capita, wealth of the family, whether the respondent owns a business that uses FV (such as a retail FV seller), and sociodemographic variables.

Findings

The average number of FV servings consumed per day in this population was around four. Regression analysis showed that household income per capita and wealth were both independently and significantly related to FV consumption, but the magnitude of the effect was minuscule. On the other hand, being a business owner that uses FV as part of the business (such as a FV retail seller or caterer) significantly increased FV consumption by about half a serving on average per day, which essentially over-rides the combined negative effect of smoking, drinking, and unemployment in reducing FV consumption.

Interpretation

Being involved in a business that uses FV significantly increased FV consumption far more than the effect from higher income or wealth. Potential reasons for the higher consumption include: lower wholesale price paid for FV by the business owners, ready access to FV when hungry, and higher consumption of unsold FV to prevent wastage.

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