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New article in *The Lancet* shows that Chile's package of healthy food policies reduces excess weight among children

In the first of its kind to measure weight outcomes, researchers from Universidad Adolfo Ibanez, University of Chile and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill assessed the impact of Chile's package of healthy food policies on excess weight gain among children. The 2016 Chilean Food Labelling and Advertising Law's Phase 1 Implementation resulted in significantly reduced excess weight among children aged 4 to 6 years, demonstrating the health impact and effectiveness of the package of food policies.

The 2016 Chilean Food Labelling and Advertising Law introduced black octagonal warning labels, marketing restrictions, and school sale bans to combat childhood obesity. The law was among the first global efforts to implement multiple healthy food policies simultaneously. Phase 1 of the law started in June 2016, with subsequent phases tightening thresholds in 2018 and 2019. The law aimed to influence both consumer behavior and food industry reformulation to reduce consumption of products high in sugar, saturated fat, sodium, and calories. Previously published evidence shows increased consumer awareness, decreased marketing exposure, and reduced availability of regulated products in schools. This is the first study to evaluate the policy's health impact on children.

The study used national cohort data from the Chilean National Board of School Aid Scholarships (JUNAEB), covering over 300,000 children ages 4-6 from 2012 to 2017. It evaluates the first phase of the law's implementation. The data included anthropometric (body) measurements, socioeconomic variables and school characteristics. The analysis compared groups of children who were not exposed to the policy measure (those who entered school between 2012-2013) with groups of children who started school after the law went into effect and were therefore exposed to it (those who entered school between 2014-2015). While the primary outcome was excess weight, researchers assessed whether the effects differed across subgroups, including school type, area, maternal education, birth weight and gender.

Key findings:

- Exposure to Phase 1 of the law led to statistically significant decreases in childhood excess weight, especially for children who were exposed to the law starting at a younger age.
- Children exposed during both kindergarten and first grade (over 18 months) showed the largest effects.



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- Girls had a 2.85% lower probability of excess weight while boys had a 2.40% lower probability.
 - Children whose mother's had higher education and those with low birth weight experienced more pronounced effects.
 - Subsidized schools and urban areas observed larger effects.
 - For example, girls enrolled in subsidized schools exhibited a 3.2% and 4.5% lower probability of excess weight when exposed during both kindergarten and first grade compared to their unexposed control cohorts.
- Children who were exposed for a shorter amount of time (only 6 months) also had excess weight reductions -1.91% (girls) and 2.24% (boys).

Key messages:

- Effective food policy interventions have the biggest potential impact in setting the younger generation up for a healthier life.
- This study provides the first evidence showing the Chilean policy package's impact on excess weight among children.
- The study's statistically significant results provide causal evidence to support implementing a package of healthy food policies.
- While industry and other actors may argue that these policies hurt vulnerable populations, this study shows positive results among vulnerable groups, such as children with low birth weight. Further, no adverse effects were observed among poorer households.
- The evidence is clear: Countries looking for effective food policies to tackle excessive weight should strongly consider a package of policies including front of package warning labels, marketing restrictions and school sales bans.

Citation:

Paraje G, Valdés N, Macaya AV, Corvalán C, Popkin B. The impact of Chile's multipronged food labelling and advertising law on early childhood excess weight: a cohort difference-in-differences study. *The Lancet*.

[Link](#)