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Title: Examining attitudes towards a proposed sugar-sweetened beverage tax among urban Indigenous adults: a qualitative study using a decolonizing lens

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Reviewer 1: Udoka Okpalauwaekwe

Institution: Academic Family Medicine, University of Saskatchewan College of Medicine
General comments (author response in bold)

We would like to thank Reviewer 1, Dr. Okpalauwaekwe, for acknowledging the interesting topic and our collective efforts involved in this partnership. Below is out itemized response to your comments/suggestions.

1. It is not vividly clear who the population the SSB tax will repress. Although I suspect it may be Indigenous people living in urban areas, I can't tell from your introduction if that's the case. Provide more clarity on that.

We have clarified that the population the tax may repress are those who are unable to change SSB behaviors due to social determinants of health such as income and food insecurity. (Page 5)

2. "Given that Indigenous people are also disproportionately affected by food insecurity (11) and poverty (12) compared to non-Indigenous populations, these disparities likely contribute to higher SSB intake." I don't know the value of this phrase to the argument as it already established in the preceding sentence. Besides I find it detracts from the directional flow of your arguments leading to the problem statement. Consider elaborating more or discard

We have clarified this statement, which hopefully better explains our intended meaning; Indigenous people consume SSB at higher volumes and frequencies, at least partially, due to experiencing higher prevalence of food insecurity and poverty. (Page 4)

3. "Despite representing a key stakeholder of the SSB taxation policy, Indigenous perspectives have not been empirically sought out by policy makers, researchers, and or health authorities in Canada to date." Is this claim context specific to NFL or MB because one could argue it is not the case in some areas. But it is not to say that it doesn't exist. Besides what do you mean by "empirically sought out." That's a terminology that may not seat well in an indigenous context where their ways of knowing clash with Euro-western ways.

**Thank you for pointing out the problematic nature of the term "empirical".
We have revised this section accordingly.** (Page 4)

4. Are you implying from your introduction that there is a sense of public non-acceptability, and lack of support for the SSB tax. If so, how did you arrive at this information? Just curious to know.

We never assumed acceptability of a SSB tax among urban Indigenous communities. Through community discussions and partnership development, we anticipated some non-acceptability among urban Indigenous adults, particularly given lack of policies to improve food security. This was one of many concerns that led to the development of the study that we wanted to explore. Importantly,

this study is part of a larger study exploring acceptability, including >100 interviews in other locations in Manitoba, including on-reserve. The broader study also included legal analysis related to the influence of the Indian Act on feasibility of taxation on-reserve and potential ramifications from (non-)taxation in neighbouring jurisdictions. These broader concerns informed the larger research project through which partners designed the research objectives to inform their own position regarding an SSB tax. (Page 6)

5. “Unintended effects of SSB tax policy may also negatively impact health through less direct pathways.” What do you mean by less direct pathways? What will be considered indirect pathways on the flip side.

We have now added clarification regarding the less direct pathway as being through economic hardship among individuals not in a position to change their behaviours. (Page 5)

Methods

6. Your methods failed to show the central motif using CBPR and decolonizing perspective which is engagement. The key question to pursuing research this way is to show how the participants/community were empowered to answer their own research questions. And not what you did on them.

Thank you for this comment. There are many aspects of community-based participatory research and as you mention, empowering participants and community to answer questions of relevance is one crucial element of this method. The purpose of this paper is to report on one answer to one research question posed by community. The question of how participants/community were empowered is an altogether different question, which we are unable to report upon in a 2500 word manuscript and likely warrants its own paper. We have clarified that, “The research question was developed in response to widespread endorsement of SSB taxation by various health organizations and the need for Indigenous organizations to gather their own data to inform their position”.

7. Using SRQR helps reporting in this sense as you position yourself and role in the research partnership and the roles the community played too. CBPR is about research with not research on. For the most part, it seemed like there was(is) some form of relationship, but it doesn't read as such. I encourage you to work on the language to show how you engaged the community, and to facilitate the processes in your methods leading up to the data analysis and interpretation. You failed to show that in your work. The TRC Calls to Action, UNDRIP, TCPS2 – Chapter 9 (2022) which include OCAP (ownership, control, access, and possession) are some of the many Indigenous developed and led tools that can be utilized to address the system gaps and change the way we teach, learn and practice as health care providers. These should be reflected in the core of your work to show that you indeed used a decolonizing lens of interpretation.

We appreciate the expansion of the word limit by the editor to address these important elements. We have moved elements of the partnerships and agreements to the methods section from the supplementary file.

In the analysis section, we have further expanded on how we shared results back with community partners, study participants, and the broader community in stages, which further refined our interpretation. We were directed to elements of the findings that resonated with community, as well as how findings should be divided in terms of “stories” or papers. For example, the finding regarding the

intractability of SSB behaviours is being more deeply explored in a forthcoming paper focused on addiction and SSB.

The supplementary file further includes how we enacted principals of OCAP on page 7.

We have referenced the TRC Calls to Action and now UNDRIP in our conclusions.
(Page 6)

8. Provide more information on how you pursued thematic analysis using Brauna and Clarke's framework. It's not enough to state it simply.

We have expanded on our analysis section. (Pages 8, 9)

9. Also, how was rigour and trustworthiness of data ensured? Including credibility, confirmability, reliability, and validity of interpretations. Were interviews sent back to the community for verification? Were elders involved? For the community on the NE, how was data sovereignty assured (it should not be assumed but stated).

All participants were provided an opportunity to receive study results; most agreed and were sent summaries, with an opportunity to respond or comment. We presented to the North End community on multiple occasions for various additional research questions based on the interviews, which included Elders at the events.

We also hosted a full day multi-partner gathering to discuss study results in August 2022. The broader team included an Elder, who has been involved since the study conception in 2017, and the gathering day began with another Elder. Results were shared through NIDA newsletters in spring and winter 2021, with opportunities for further feedback from other Indigenous communities invested in type 2 diabetes prevention, treatment, and wellness. (Page 9)

Discussion

10. I expected more in-depth discourse based on your findings especially since you claimed to use a decolonizing lens. I didn't see any of it reflected in your discussion. I feel there should be more discourse with the elders and traditional knowledge keepers to show how the SSB tax policy is antithetical to the TRC calls for action. I didn't see it! As you stated, decolonizing research centers Indigenous knowledge, perspectives, and approaches to research...how are the voices centred towards self-determination. You touched it a teeny bit, but I expected more. Perhaps positioning the voices of the people more. Again, this goes back to the question of how authentic was the engagement processes leading to this. Real engagement shows in the practical implications. The beauty of CBPR is in its ability to cause community change, transformation, and emancipation. How did that evolve in your work? How were participants transformed? How were you transformed? What opportunities for change came out of this partnership?

We recognize that we submitted to a medical journal with limited word counts. This was something we had to weigh in determining how to share our findings while attempting to have them published in a venue that is impactful to influence policy. Quotes were included in a separate table to ensure we could share/amplify as many of the voices and perspectives we could.

Indeed, one of the themes was 'self-determination is critical'.

Another important element of centring perspectives included separate papers that are focused on topics and issues addressed by participants and supported by community. For example, there are forthcoming papers from the broader study

focused on the experiences of urban Indigenous adults purchasing SSB and stigma; SSB and addiction; perspectives of diet drinks; and additional interviews conducted on-reserve.

It was community partners' decision to include purposive sampling to ensure we talked to people who consume SSB (and are targeted by a tax), parents, youth, and Elders.

Perhaps a study limited to Elders may have provided different results, but that was not how we decided to design the study.

We believe our CBPR design has led to practical implications for policy development in Canada by bringing forth concerns raised by Indigenous people. This work has led to 20 participants being able to speak to or respond to major health organizations endorsing a policy many view as harmful. Working as researchers, publishing academic articles, presenting at conferences, and disagreeing, using a decolonizing approach, and providing counter evidence to the World Health Organization, Diabetes Canada, and Heart and Stroke Foundation (multi-million dollar organizations) is transformational.

'Sin taxes', such as tobacco, are widely viewed as some of public health's greatest achievements. Yet, smoking remains unacceptably high among Indigenous populations, and tobacco taxation was not widely implemented on-reserve. Gathering Indigenous perspectives during tobacco tax policy development was not completed nor considered to our knowledge. An in-depth examination of SSB taxes (another 'sin tax') from a decolonizing perspective is wholly novel and transformational research, but also not something that can be disseminated in one short paper.

As you eloquently noted, CBPR transforms you. We fully agree. I am sure you can appreciate that as the PI conducting this research, I could write a book about the process, and the process has not ended. Even the part of partners receiving editor and peer review comments is fraught. This is something many of us will continue to reflect on.

Reviewer 2: Dr. Tracey Galloway

Institution: Anthropology, University of Toronto — Mississauga
General comments (author response in bold)

General comments:

Thank-you for the opportunity to review this paper, which describes a qualitative study of attitudes toward proposed sugar-sweetened beverage (SSB) tax among Indigenous residents of north-End Winnipeg. The topic is timely within the Canadian health care milieu. The methods are appropriate, but require greater elaboration prior to publishing (see my detailed comments below). With attention to a few details, the Results will elaborate an interesting range of local perspectives on use of the proposed intervention in an urban Indigenous community context. The Discussion is particularly well-written and I have only a few suggestions that may strengthen the impact of this important paper. With the proposed modifications, I think it will make an excellent contribution to the journal.

Detailed comments:

1. p. 4, l. 17 - remove “and racial”; Indigeneity is an ethnocultural distinction; there is no justification for defining Indigeneity as a “racial” classification, either biological or social; rather use of the term “race” perpetuates harmful racial essentialism that underpins prejudice and inequity

We agree and were not referring to Indigenous people as a racial group. Rather the paper we are referencing compares Indigenous groups to other ethnic and racialized groups, such as white populations (white is not an ethnic group). We have now used the term ‘racialized’ instead and ‘racial’ has been removed both from the abstract (p.3) and introduction (p.4)

2. p. 6 characterize Winnipeg’s NE as a “food desert” using definition where grocery stores are located 0.5 km or more from residential areas; this approach has been heavily critiqued (see Shannon 2013, others)

We are not disagreeing with the arguments made by Shannon 2013. We too believe that food procurement patterns are very complex and extend beyond availability and distance to stores. However, in the present study and context, as expressed by the participants and community partners, distance to grocery stores is an important factor given the area’s lower economic status, participants’ utilization of public transportation, and the cold winters in Winnipeg, which further hinder residents’ access to food in terms of variety, price, and quality. In our companion paper (currently under review), we too discuss how transportation, segregation, low wages, stigma, and other factors all contribute to food ways and procurement of SSB. We have used the term ‘food desert’ because that is the term used in the report we have referenced to describe the neighbourhood. We have now acknowledged that the term is controversial. (Page 7)

3. p. 6 - what is meant by “self-identifying?...regularly consume SSB?...experienced for insecurity? how were these operationalized?

In the recruitment process we left it up to the community research assistant to identify and recruit participants. As we collected demographic and interview data, we had continual conversations to ensure we were recruiting participants meeting some of the purposive sampling considerations and acquiring a broad range of perspectives, i.e. similar numbers of men and women, individuals caring for dependents, Elders, etc. We did not follow up with additional screening questions beyond the demographic form because we did not perceive it would be helpful and could potentially only make participants feel uncomfortable. (N/A)

4. p. 6 - operationalize “Elders”; was this self-declared? was there an age range?

Elders were identified and invited to participate by the community research assistant and community partner, in keeping with the CBPR approach. Age range was not a criterion for selection. We cannot disclose the age of Elders due to small number of participants. Additionally, people are not considered Elders within Indigenous communities based on age, but rather respect in seeing someone as an Elder. We expanded the sentence to include how the Elders were identified and recruited. (Page 7)

5. p. 7 - “other demographic results were previously reported”; citation provided; best practice is to also provide here, eg. in a table

We have added a Table summarizing the demographic characteristics of the sample (Page 22)

6. p. 7 - re: “overall strong opposition”, how was “proposed taxation of SSB” presented to participants? In a verbal statement or on a questionnaire? Can we see this?

We first asked participants if they were familiar with the proposal for a SSB tax about mid-way through the interview guide, and if so, where they heard it from. If not, we introduced that some health organizations had proposed a tax on sugar-sweetened beverages without any additional information provided. As now described in our positionality section, after several interviews, we began verbally explaining prior to interviews beginning that the academic researchers are partnering with Indigenous community organizations (NIDA and Fearless R2W) to explore Indigenous perspectives of a tax (as stated in the consent form), but that no one involved had the power to implement such a policy, nor had anyone involved endorsed such a policy publicly, we are simply interested in hearing individuals’ perspectives. In this study, and other interviews with non-Indigenous participants, we frequently encountered assumptions that the research team was supportive of a SSB tax, despite our attempts to remain neutral in the interviewing. We attributed this to the research team’s affiliation with an academic institution, being non-Indigenous, and the PI’s affiliation with a Department of Food and Human Nutritional Sciences (as noted on the consent forms). (Appendix)

7. p. 7 - “disappointment characterized by Gavin as the norm”; should inform the reader prior to this point that interviewees were assigned a pseudonym for the purpose of presenting results

Thank you, we have now clarified this. (Page 10)

8. p. 8 - sentence beginning “In discussing a tax” is a powerful one. Be sure the language used is accurate. “In discussing a proposed tax on SSB” rather than that used at present.

Thank you, corrected (Page 11)

9. p. 8 - similarly, par. beginning “The true benefactors...” is powerful, describes a really key set of results.

We have added the word, ‘proposed’ in front of policy to be consistent with status of the policy being discussed. (Page 12)

10. p. 9 - sentence beginning “Given that privileged people...” is a great linking sentence.

Thank you.

11. p. 9 - the following phrase requires re-wording for grammar: “Participants predicted based on their previous experiences that...”. Suggest “Based on their previous experiences, participants predicted that...”

Thank you, we have revised. (Page 12)

12. p. 9 - “Many participants predict” - Caution about this wording. It is a small sample. Perhaps just provide the number. Same with later sentence “Some participants”; two? three? five?

We have inserted number of participants where possible and appropriate. However, number of participants mentioning a phenomenon does not necessarily support the breath and or legitimacy of a category or theme, and is not a practice

aligned with the qualitative methods chosen. This is not a representative sample of Indigenous people living in the North End, and it is not intended to be. (N/A)

13. p. 9 - suggest use “English” rather than “British” to describe folklore; for various historical reasons, the term “British” is more associated with the post-Medieval Act of Union.

Thank you, we have revised this. (Page 13)

14. p. 10 - expand the term “EIA” in a footnote for the reader.

Abbreviation expanded within text. (Page 13)

15. p. 10 - “A couple of participants anticipate...” - Again, state the exact number here. Also, consider use of tense. The author does a good job of moving between past tense (to describe participants’ statements) and future tense (to describe possible outcomes of SSB tax). Here, it seems “anticipated” is more appropriate, in keeping with (same par.) “discussed” and “there was concern”.

See response above #13 regarding number of participants.

Thank you, we have revised to be “anticipated”. (Page 13)

16. p. 10 - “Indigenous input and self-determination WERE critical...”

Thank you, this has been revised. (Page 14)

17. p. 12 - “...regular consumers, who are disproportionately Indigenous and food insecure” This needs significant modification. State “SSB consumers” to be clear that this is the constituency affected. Also, the studies cited do not show that SSB consumers are disproportionately Indigenous; rather, they show that Indigenous populations have SSB consumption patterns (and food insecurity prevalence) that are higher than in the population as a whole. This is a very different thing.

Thank you, this has been revised (Page 15)

18. p. 12 - “trauma” - can this be more broadly or accurately stated? lived experience of inter-generational trauma, for eg?

In this case we are referring to predictors of SSB intake, and trauma or post-traumatic stress is one of them. The studies cited are not specific to Indigenous populations, though we acknowledge that inter-generational trauma may be related to SSB intake. We are not aware of any papers in this area specifically.

(N/A)

19. p. 13 - “seeks to extract resources (i.e. money) from Indigenous people” - May be conflating intent with effect here. I know of no justification for a proposed SSB that involves penalty; rather, intention appears to be behaviour modification through disincentivizing SSB purchases. The outcome, as author writes, is likely to be extractive. Be accurate about intent and effect.

Thank you for this comment. The purpose of an SSB tax, as described by many of its proponents, often includes either a primary or secondary objective to generate revenue for health equity-enhancing programs. However, you are correct that proponents never mention or clarify from whom the revenue is generated. Intention is therefore difficult to ascertain. We have revised the term used from “seeks” to “acts” to ensure we do not make assumptions about any organizations’ intentions.

20. p. 13 - "This is the definition of colonialism" - Suggest the author remove this sentence. Rather, return to this framework, explicitly situating key findings within it here (eg. previous qualitative research using a settler-decolonizing approach has demonstrated that behaviour-based approaches, developed without prior, culturally-safe engagement, tend to replicate, indeed worsen health inequities for Indigenous communities, eg. Plessas et al 2021, Wilkinson et al 2022). The research is well-framed within decolonizing theory, which is well-defined on p. 5. A return to this framework will bookend that approach nicely.

We have removed the statement about colonialism and returned to our framework here. The references provided, while appreciated, are not specific to broader policy so we have elected not to use them, as well as to respect the word and reference limits of the journal.