Evaluating nutrition labeling policy changes in the US and Mexico

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Background

• Mexico and the US are among the most obese countries in the world
  – 72.5% and 71.6% of adults, respectively, are overweight or obese

• Diet-related risk factors and diseases are disproportionately high among Mexicans and US Latinx adults – the largest ethnic minority group in the US

![Pie chart showing country of heritage for US Latinxs]

- 63% Mexican-American
- 8% Puerto Rican
- 6% Cuban-American
- 9% Central American
- 4% South American
- 10% Other
Food labeling: Broad reaching, low-cost population-level intervention to promote healthy diets

- **Nutrition Facts Table**
  - Mandatory in the US and Mexico
  - Widely used
    - Less use among people with lower SES
  - Quantitative information
    - People from lower-SES groups struggle to understand and apply the information
  - Location on the back or side of food packages requires substantial effort to compare products
Front of package (FoP) labeling systems

- Aim to reduce cognitive effort and time for processing key nutrient information
  - Synthesize nutrient information

- Placement on package front allows for easier product comparison at point of selection

- Little is known about which system is most effective under natural exposure conditions
International Food Policy Study

Use an Interrupted Time Series design to evaluate the population-level impact of mandatory Front-of-Package (FoP) warning labels in Mexico relative to nutrition facts table (NFT) augmentation in the US, including disparities in policy effects.

Labeling policy changes
Enhanced NFTs

FoP Warnings

Policy-specific outcomes
Labeling responses
Label awareness
Label use
Nutrition knowledge
Processed foods
Beverages*
Sugary food norms*

Diet-related behaviors
• Beverage intake (e.g., calories, sugar, sodium, saturated fats)
• Fruit & vegetable intake*
• Efforts to reduce unhealthy food intake*

Hypothesized
Health literacy
SES (e.g., income, education)
Neighborhood disadvantage
Food security
Primary shopper for household

Moderators
Exploratory*
Food access
Access to potable water
Worry about safety

*Secondary outcomes
Interrupted Time Series Study Design

Sample sizes at each survey wave

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HS=High School
**Awareness, Understanding, & Use of Nutrition Facts Tables (NFTs)**

- **Spotlight effect:** emotional response to stimulus (FoP warning) → scrutinize the cause of the feeling (NFT) – promotes attention, credibility, elaboration, & recall of messages

**Frequency of using NFTs to decide what to buy**

- 1. Response options: 1-never; 2=rarely; 3=sometimes; 4=often; 5=all the time

**Ease of understanding NFTs**

- 2. Response options: 1=Very hard; 2=Hard; 3=Neither hard nor easy; 4=Easy; 5=Very easy

*Preliminary Results*
Conclusions & Future Directions

- **2018 – 2020**: Among FoP labels across 5 countries, Mexico’s FoP Warnings were most often noticed, used & understood
  - May promote spotlight effect → greater use & understanding of Nutrition Facts Table

- Assess **dietary behaviors**, including **health equity effects**
  - **Primary outcome**: Calorie intake from Beverage Freq Questionnaire
    - Simulation studies, FoP warnings for sugar-sweetened beverages alone would reduce obesity by 3-5%
  - **Secondary outcomes**: F & V intake; Efforts to eat healthier foods
  - Less able to capture some dietary-related nutrient intake targeted by FoP warnings (e.g., salt, fat)

- **Spillover into US**
  - Contamination or unintended positive consequence?

- **Welcome participation in the study & its expansions**
Thanks!

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