

Factors associated with weekly consumption of sugar-sweetened drinks among the adult population of Ireland. A baseline study pre- introduction of the sugar sweetened drinks (SSDs) tax.

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Introduction

The aim of this study was to identify demographic and behavioral factors associated with high consumption of sugar-sweetened drinks (SSDs) among adults in the Irish population prior to the recent introduction of a targeted tax on SSDs on 1st May 2018. The tax, vigorously opposed by lobbyists, is a significant policy initiative targeted at our obesity problem. There is considerable debate about the effectiveness, or otherwise of such taxes, and given the very large commercial interests, it is important to assemble as much robust evidence as possible of their effects.

Data from the Healthy Ireland 2016 (Wave 1) household survey were analyzed. Ethical approval was obtained from the Department of Health. Multivariate analyses carried out using logistic and ordinal regression modeling.

The response rate was 61%. Over half (58.0%) stated that they had consumed sugar sweetened drinks with 39.3% consuming them frequently (weekly or more often). Demographic factors significantly associated with frequent consumption of SSDs were being male (OR 1.4 95% CI 1.2-1.6, $p < 0.001$), being younger than 25 years (OR 11.6, 95% CI 9.3-14.5, $p < 0.001$) and low social class (OR 1.41 95% CI 1.23-1.61) with secondary education or less (OR 1.5, 95% CI 1.3-1.7, $p < 0.001$). Controlling for age, gender and social class, health behavioral and health status associated with weekly consumption of SSDs were being overweight (OR 1.2 95% CI 1.1-1.3, $p < 0.05$), being obese (OR 1.4 95% CI 1.2-1.6, $p < 0.001$), being a regular smoker (OR 1.5 95% CI 1.3-1.8, $p < 0.001$) being a regular binge drinker (OR 1.2, 95% CI 1.1-1.4, $p < 0.001$) and being 50% less likely to eat the recommended daily portions of fruit and vegetable (OR 0.53, 95% CI 0.46-0.61, $p < 0.001$).

This study found that frequent SSD consumption is highest among the most disadvantaged. There is strong evidence of a cluster of mutually associated unhealthy behaviors among frequent SSD drinkers. These data provide a baseline for future evaluations of the impact of the sugar tax aimed at reducing obesity.

Dr. Anne O'Farrell currently works as an Epidemiologist/Biostatistician in the Health Intelligence Unit of the Health Service Executive (HSE) in Ireland. Anne's obtained a BSc (Hons) Biological Science in 1997 from University College London, an MSc in Epidemiology from London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) in 2001 and she completed her HRB funded PhD in Epidemiology at Trinity College in 2010. Anne was recently made a Fellow of the Royal Academy of Medicine Ireland (RAMI). Anne has published over 30 peer-reviewed papers and has reviewed many peer reviewed papers. Anne has mentored undergraduate and PhD students. Anne has presented her work at many national and international conferences and has also chaired and ran workshops at conferences. Her main areas of interests are epidemiology of the social determinants of health, social exclusion, care of the elderly, fuel poverty, alcohol and tobacco misuse, homelessness, health policy and health economic policy.

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