***Sugar Sweetened Beverages Coverage in the British Media – An Analysis of Public Health Advocacy versus Pro-Industry Messaging***

**Authors**

Alex Elliott-Green( MBChB)1, Lirije Hyseni (MSc)1 Ffion Lloyd-Williams (PhD)1; Helen Bromley (PhD) 1; Simon Capewell (DSc)1

**Author affiliations**

1University of Liverpool, Liverpool, Merseyside, UK

**Corresponding Author:**

Dr Ffion Lloyd-Williams

Department of Public Health & Policy,

Institute of Psychology, Health & Society,

Whelan Building, Quadrangle,  
University of Liverpool

LIVERPOOL,

L69 3GB  
United Kingdom

Telephone: 0044 (0)151 794 5571  
Fax: 0044 (0)151 794 5588  
  
email: [ffionlw@liverpool.ac.uk](mailto:ffionlw@liverpool.ac.uk)

**Word Count:** 348

**Funding Received:** None

**Author’s Contributions:** A E-G led the project. SC, LH, FLW, and HB helped to design, guide and deliver the project. A E-G and LH undertook the searches and analysed the articles. A E-G wrote the paper with input and approval from all authors.

**Competing Interests:** None

**Background**: Sugar–sweetened beverages (SSBs) are an increasing contributor to rising rates of diabetes, obesity and cardiovascular disease. The media has an important role in framing perceptions of these products and therefore has significant potential to influence public health policy. We assessed the extent of media-based public health advocacy versus pro-industry messaging regarding SSBs.

**Methods:** We conducted a systematic analysis to identify and examine all articles regarding SSBs published in all mainstream British print newspapers and their online news websites from 1st January 2014 to 31st December 2014. English language articles were sourced via the Nexis database using the following search terms:  Sugar\* W/5 beverage\* (Sugar\* followed by beverage maximum of 5 words later); Sugar\* W/p soft drink\* (Sugar\* within the same paragraph soft drink\*); Fizz\* Drink\*; Sugar\* drink\*.

We conducted a brief literature search to develop appropriate search terms and categorisations for grouping and analysing articles. Articles were coded according to the publishing newspaper, article type, topic, prominence and slant (pro or anti-SSB). A contextual analysis was undertaken to examine key messages in the articles.

**Findings:** We identified 374 articles published during 2014. The majority (81%) suggested that SSBs are unhealthy. Messaging from experts, campaign groups and health organisations was fairly consistent about the detrimental effects of SSB on health (i.e. advocating a 30% reduction in sugar intake).

Approaches or solutions to potentially combat the problems associated with SSBs were: 36% no solutions, 31% individual responsibility, 24% policy changes, 9% 0ther.Only 24% suggested any policy change.

Articles concerning the food industry (n = 57/374) produced consistent messages emphasising consumer choice and individual responsibility for making choices regarding SSB consumption, and promoting and advertising their products. The food industry thus managed to avoid association with the negative press that their products were receiving.

**Interpretation:** Sugar–sweetened beverages were frequently published in mainstream British print newspapers and their online news websites during 2014. Public health media advocacy was prominent throughout, with a growing consensus that SSBs are bad for health. However, the challenge for public health will be to mobilise supportive public opinion to help implement effective regulatory policies.