POLICY MAPPING OF REGULATIONS ON CHILD-TARGETED UNHEALTHY FOOD AND NON-ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGE ADVERTISING: ALIGNMENT WITH WHO RECOMMENDATIONS

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Abstract

The WHO 2010 recommendations provide a framework for restricting marketing of foods and non-alcoholic beverages (FNAB) to children. This study aimed to assess the alignment of policies in SAARC countries and four selected OECD countries (Australia, Chile, the UK and USA) with the 12 WHO recommendations. A policy review was conducted from March to June 2025 in publicly available policy documents through a systematic search in PubMed, EMBASE and Google Scholar, supplemented by general web searches, grey literature, and targeted screening of government and relevant organisational websites. Eligible documents included laws, regulations, policies, strategies, guidelines and voluntary or self-regulatory codes addressing marketing or advertising of unhealthy FNAB to children. The review followed PRISMA policy review guidance. Documents were assessed using a predefined matrix, with each WHO recommendation classified as fully aligned, partially aligned, or not covered according to the substantive policy provisions identified. Sixty-six documents were included: 12 from Sri Lanka, 29 from other SAARC countries and 25 from the selected OECD countries. No country demonstrated full alignment with all 12 WHO recommendations. The OECD countries generally showed greater documented policy alignment than SAARC countries. Chile demonstrated full alignment with nine recommendations and partial alignment with three, while the UK demonstrated full alignment with four and partial alignment with eight. Policies in the USA and Australia showed predominantly partial alignment. SAARC countries demonstrated limited documented alignment overall. The review identified substantial gaps in documented policy alignment with the WHO recommendations, particularly in South Asia. In Sri Lanka, identified gaps included limited statutory integration of nutrient profiling, incomplete coverage of digital and cross-border marketing, and limited monitoring and enforcement mechanisms. Strengthening these policy areas could improve the comprehensiveness of protection against child-targeted unhealthy FNAB marketing.

Keywords: WHO recommendations, Child-targeted Food marketing and advertising; Policy analysis; SAARC, OECD