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Sugar-Sweetened Beverage-Reduction Messages and Parents’ Intentions to Reduce Their Consumption: The Moderating Role of Weight Stigma History

Abstract

Research indicates media campaigns targeting weight-related health behaviors can make overweight individuals feel stigmatized. This study examines the role of prior weight stigmatization in parents’ reactions to sugar-sweetened beverage (SSB) reduction messages. An online survey experiment was conducted with 807 parents randomly assigned to view two videos representing one of three persuasive appeals (fear, humor, or nurturance) or unrelated control videos. Subsequent emotional responses, evaluation of argument strength, and intentions to reduce SSB consumption were measured. Prior stigmatization had no direct effect on emotional responses or perceived argument strength. Stigmatized parents had higher empowerment/hopeful feelings than non-stigmatized parents after viewing humorous videos. Negative, positive, and protective emotions predicted lower intentions to reduce consumption among stigmatized participants. Empowerment/hopeful emotions and argument strength were the strongest predictors of intention to reduce SSB consumption and were not moderated. Findings suggest that campaign designers should choose messages with strong arguments that target empowerment/hopeful emotions.