

Individual Write-up – Lizette Romano

1. Question: How would you go about assessing the health impact of the New York trans-fat ban?

I would first assess the health impact of the New York trans-fat ban by collecting survey data about food access, food availability, restaurant price changes, and changes to eating habits at home and restaurants from the communities that were directly impacted. I would want to know if the ban caused an economic strain or any additional stress in shopping for food and eating out and whether there were any unintended mental health or financial consequences. Through the survey, I would also want to measure whether the trans-fat ban led people to explore other healthier choices in their everyday lives once they learned the effects that food choices can have for their health. I would assess for any patterns that might show that residents left the state when the ban was implemented and would like to follow-up with them regarding their decision to leave. People who can move to a new home more easily would likely have broader access to resources. I think it would be important to compare how resources affect health outcomes versus policy interventions targeting one specific health issue.

2. Question: Discuss the role of scientific evidence in New York's choice to first educate the public about trans-fats and then to ban them. What were the strengths of the evidence and what were the weaknesses?

The scientific evidence used by New York to highlight trans fats as a health issue included CVD mortality associated with trans-fat consumption and race/ethnicity of communities most affected by trans fats. One strength of the evidence that was used was that there was a clear association between trans fat consumption and an increased risk of CVD mortality: this was backed by data showing the harmful effects of trans fats that had been known for years. Another strength was that New York implemented the ban in phases and was able to compare how the ban affected health in different communities. When communities of color had the trans fat ban implemented CVD as a health outcome also decreased: this has the effect of showing that the implementation of a ban would be feasible in varying communities. Some of the weaknesses of the evidence presented also involved race/ethnicity, specifically Black and Hispanics, being a larger majority of those who were studied. This could be a weakness since the evidence provided could be skewed to reflect the health outcomes of these two racial/ethnic populations. Another weakness of the study is its reliance on hospital data given that in the U.S. medical care is not universal and the data may exclude people for whom medical care is not accessible.

3. Question: Discuss the ethical principle of justice in the context of this case. In what ways would a ban on trans-fats exacerbate and in what ways might it diminish racial/ethnic and socioeconomic health inequities in New York?

The ban on trans-fat might exacerbate racial/ethnic inequities in New York since communities of color who made up a big portion of where the trans fat ban was first

implemented might feel targeted by the state and feel as though their freedom power is being limited. Financial costs to consumers could lead to stress and add to the chronic stress that many communities of color already face when dealing with navigating institutions and systems designed to work against them. The ban might exacerbate socioeconomic inequities since the ban could potentially increase food prices in several sectors. People who have less monetary resources might not be able to afford the added prices that stores might impose to their foods because of the implementation costs of the ban. Additionally, someone with a lower socioeconomic status who is a small business owner might incur higher out of pocket costs in implementing the new trans-fat ban when compared to the resources that a larger chain restaurant has. On the contrary, the trans-fat ban might diminish racial/ethnic health inequities because it would improve people's physical health, force suppliers to increase trans-fat free food options, and would be an easy way for people to eat in a healthier way without them having to spend their time seeking out trans-fat free options. In addition, people might be more likely to seek medical care for other aspects of their life if they felt that the state truly cared about their well-being, which could potentially increase quality of life. The trans-fat ban might also diminish socioeconomic health inequities by decreasing lifetime medical costs to communities that might otherwise not had the literacy or nutritional education to understand the harm in trans-fats.

4. Question: Briefly discuss the strategies that the New York Health Department used to build coalitions to support the policy change (a) within the Health Department, (b) within the City government, and (c) within the broader

community. Propose one or two additional strategies that New York could have undertaken and explain why it (or they) might be effective.

Strategies that the New York Health Department used to build coalitions to support the policy change within the Health Department included measuring how long it would take for health inspectors to measure trans fats and providing the department with the power of enforcement so that the ban would be successful. Coalitions among the City government were built by showing the city the data between the harmful effects of trans fats and focusing on health outcomes in the city of New York. Strategies that were used for the broader community included educational campaigns informing the public of the harms of trans fats and asking the public to get involved by writing to businesses about the elimination of trans fats. One additional strategy that New York could have taken is keeping a list available to the public showing what establishments had removed trans-fat items. Another strategy could be displaying signs outside of establishments that successfully removed trans-fat items in a similar way letter grade ratings are posted outside of restaurants. These strategies would be effective since businesses would be held accountable and the public could easily see which businesses followed guidelines. Support that would have been beneficial after the ban was approved could include hiring additional health inspectors, pay increases to current inspectors, grants to small businesses to offset the costs of switching to trans-fat free production and continuing to remind the public to submit commentary to businesses to eliminate their trans-fat use.