

Effect of Health Advisories in the Seafood Market

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Problem Statement

There is a concern that health advisories related to the consumption of seafood may be causing inefficiencies in the market. Health advisories are important to inform the public of possible dangers in our environment, but there is the potential problem of the health advisory creating a halo effect. This is when a specific concept or attribute is generalized to an area where it is not necessarily correct to do so.

The case I would like to look at, involves a health advisory jointly released in 2004 by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) on the consumption of seafood. The main points of the advisory are, that there are benefits of eating seafood, but women of child bearing age and developing children should avoid eating seafood that is high in mercury. In particular, shark, swordfish, king mackerel, and tilefish should be avoided all together by this group and they should limit all other types of seafood to twelve ounces per week. A concern is that this warning may have created a halo effect in the fishing industry. There are two potential areas the advisory could be having this effect. Consumption might be decreased in unintended areas of the population, i.e. men or women who are not having children, or consumption of unintended species could be decreased, i.e. fish that are low in mercury.

Policy Questions

Some policy questions I am interested in researching are:

- Does consumer behavior change in response to health advisories?
- Are health advisories achieving their intended effect?
- Is there a willingness to pay, amongst consumers, for safety information in the seafood market?



Tools and Techniques

The National Fisheries Institute (NFI) has an interest in consumer's barriers to consumption of seafood. For this reason they have agreed to fund a survey to be conducted by Doris Hicks, Lori Pivarnik, and myself. Through this survey, these questions will be attempted to be answered. The survey will be conducted via the internet. Zoomerang Survey is the company we will use to distribute the survey.



Proposed Research

I will conduct the survey to attempt to determine if the public is aware of the health advisories. Then, determine if the awareness of health advisories is leading to decreases in the amount of seafood eaten. Consumption should fall only in the targeted area if the advisory is functioning properly; if this is the case then the advisory is good for society. However, if there is a halo effect, the advisory is overshooting its mark, and the advisory is causing the public to needlessly miss the health benefits of eating seafood, then the advisory has created a bad for society. Lastly, I would like to see if the public will reveal a willingness to pay for a reduction in the risk of eating seafood. This could inform policies on health advisories and safety labeling of seafood.

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