Review of “Healthy Food Options at Dollar Discount Stores are Equivalent in Quality and Lower in Price Compared to Grocery Stores: An Examination in Las Vegas, NV”
ID: ijerph-392104

Main comments
It is a very interesting paper presenting original and new results, that fit well to the purpose of the journal. The conclusions are highly relevant to tackle social inequalities in nutrition and health, but would warrant extended discussion with reference with similar studies conducted in other location/other countries.

Conclusion 1) “While dollar-discount stores did have lower availability, they provided quality fresh and healthy foods which were usually less expensive.”

=> “Dollar Discount Stores” seem to be very specific to the US, but it could be useful to readers from other countries to make some analogy with what exist in their countries. In particular I am thinking in hard discount stores in Europe (Aldi, Lidl, Dia.. ?), and in the selling of discount foods in regular supermarket chains in many countries.

For instance, some studies found that prices differences between branded foods and generic or low-cost foods are not associated with parallel differences in nutritional quality. Another study found that diets aren’t healthier when they contain branded foods. Hence, compared with branded products, non-branded alternatives present better nutritional quality for their price and should therefore be preferred options to improve dietary quality when the budget for food is low. See

- Waterlander WE, van Kouwen M, Steenhuis IHM. Are diets healthier when they contain branded foods? British Food Journal · October 2014

Conclusion 2) practitioners should consider non-traditional outlets when assessing the community food environment and designing and implementing outreach programs, as they may bridge some disparities in access.

=> This conclusion is important, but it may imply that nothing similar has been done previously. I think that the authors have to check. I know at least one successful intervention study conducted in discount stores which combined shelf labeling with a social marketing strategy to promote inexpensive foods with good nutritional quality (Gamburzew A, Darcel N, Gazan R, Dubois C, Maillot M, Tomé D, Raffin S, Darmon N. In-store marketing of inexpensive foods with good nutritional quality in disadvantaged neighborhoods: increased awareness, understanding and purchasing. Int J Behav Nutr Phys Activity, 2016, 13:104.), and I there are also very inspiring in-store interventions in poor populations conducted by John Gittelsohn, and colleagues.
Specific comments

Title
I would remove quality from the title, because it is only “perceived quality” and it was only studied for produces (if I understand correctly). Alternatively, you could use the term ‘perceived quality’

Abstract
The abstract is difficult to read because some definitions are lacking:
- Provide a simple and short explanation of what is a “dollar-discount store”. Line 4, you state that they are “stores that sold produce at fixed $1 price”: is this the definition?
- Explain what is the NEMS-S, and that it is made of 3 “sub-scores” assessing respectively availability, quality and price, leading to a “total score” when the sub-scores are summed (isn’t it?). And then use this terminology throughout the paper.
- Explain what is “M”

Introduction
- Line 67: ref 16 has to be introduced here.

Methods
- Lines 93-94: introduce the terminology of sub-scores. It will be easier to read.
- Line 109: the statement that “all items were recalculated to price per piece” is not always true: it is for fruit but not for bread (lines112-113).

Discussion
- Line 181: replace have higher prices by are likely to have higher prices, or include a reference.
- Line 193: price modification is not the only tool, and it is not an easy tool to implement for the long term. Social marketing of foods that already are healthy and inexpensive is another option, probably easier to implement because it doesn’t imply additional costs, neither for the shopper, nor for the vendor, nor for the public authorities (Gamburzew A, Int J Behav Nutr Phys Activity, 2016, 13:104.).
- Line 201-202: it seems that references 31-34 apply to the first part of the sentence (“consumers perceive brand names to be of higher quality”) but additional references should be added to document the second part of the sentence (“even when they aren’t”)=> For instance, Cooper S et al J Hum Nutr Diet. 2003;16:339–347; - Darmon N, et al Public Health Nutr 2009;12: 808–815; Waterlander WE et al 2014 British Food Journal)
- One important thing is lacking in the discussion: the fact that the total score of NEMS-S is not relevant when one wants to evaluate the capacity of a store to provide good nutrition at good price for low-income people. The sub-scores seem to be more informative.