



National Tobacco Control Policies: do they have a differential social impact?

- Cigarette smoking is a major health and social issue across the world; five million people die of smoking related diseases every year
- Effective tobacco control policies can help prevent young people from taking up the habit, support smokers wishing to quit, and protect people from the damaging effects of second-hand smoke.
- In recent years, a series of new tobacco control policies have been introduced in the UK. These include: a comprehensive ban on tobacco advertising and promotion (February 2003); enlarged on-pack text warnings (January 2003); and a ban on misleading product descriptors such as 'light' and 'mild' (September 2003).
- This study uses data from the International Tobacco Control Policy Evaluation Study, an ongoing cross-country study (Australia, Canada, UK and USA), to assess whether there are any socioeconomic differentials in the impact of these three policies on smokers.
- Ad bans, enhanced warning labels and the elimination of misleading product descriptors appear to have a uniform impact across socio-economic groups.
- The study found that enhanced warning labels led to increased awareness and processing of warning messages and that the advertising and promotions ban drove substantial reductions in tobacco marketing awareness.
- Given the disproportionately high smoking rates in disadvantaged populations, these tobacco control policies are likely to be having a bigger proportional impact in these communities.

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About PHRC: The Public Health Research Consortium (PHRC) is funded by the Department of Health Policy Research Programme. The PHRC brings together researchers from 11 UK institutions and aims to strengthen the evidence base for public health, with a strong emphasis on tackling socioeconomic inequalities in health. For more information, visit: www.york.ac.uk/phrc/index.htm

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