

NEW RESEARCH: STRENGTHENING TOBACCO CONTROL IN UKRAINE

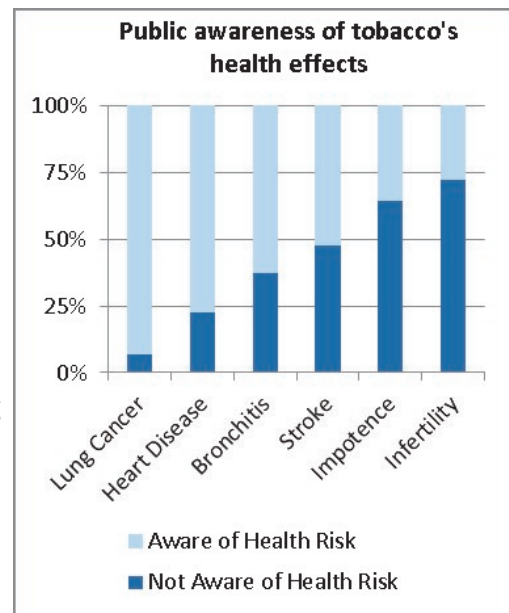
Tobacco-related diseases such as heart disease and cancer are among the leading causes of death in Ukraine. Almost half of males over 18 are smokers, and female smoking prevalence is high for the region, at 12%. As half of all tobacco-related deaths occur during prime productive years, the economic effect of the tobacco epidemic is considerable. An urgent policy response is required to reduce the prevalence of smoking and its public health impacts.

This policy brief provides results from a nationally-representative household survey of 2000 randomly selected people in Ukraine in 2010. The research was from the Health in Times of Transition (HITT) study (<http://www.hitt-cis.net>). Further details can be found in the sources below.

KEY STUDY FINDINGS

Public knowledge of the health effects of tobacco is very low

Though there may be basic awareness among the general public that smoking harms health, they do not fully understand its relationship with specific diseases. If the addictiveness of tobacco and full range of health dangers are not known, people believe they can stop smoking before health problems occur. The reality is that most tobacco users will be unable to stop, and up to half will die from tobacco-related illnesses.

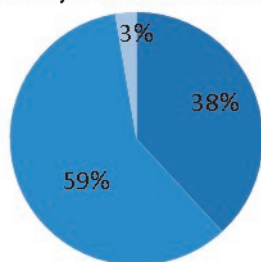


Gaps in legislation and enforcement on cigarette packaging

When judged against recommendations of the global Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), which Ukraine has ratified, there are issues with the enforcement of national legislation:

- Deceptive labels such as 'lights' are banned, but still appear on cigarette packets. Almost half of respondents wrongly thought that 'lights' were less harmful than 'regular' cigarettes

Public support for restricting smoking in cafes, restaurants & bars



- There should be a total ban
- Smokers should be separate from non-smokers
- Should be no smoking ban

Public support for stronger tobacco control

The vast majority felt that authorities were not doing enough to fight tobacco. 1 in 3 respondents support a total ban against smoking in bars and restaurants and 2 out of 3 respondents supported price increases for tobacco.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Educate the public about specific health risks. Knowledge of the health impacts of tobacco is a vital element of behavioural change, and support for tobacco control is greater among those who know the health effects. Poor awareness of health risks can be addressed by public awareness campaigns and improved health messages on cigarette packaging.

Strengthen ban on deceptive labelling. Stronger enforcement of legislation is needed to prevent deceptive labels such as 'light' from undermining health warnings. Legislation should clearly identify authorities responsible for enforcement and should include a system to monitor compliance and prosecute violations. Legislation on deceptive labelling could also be more comprehensive, as even when deceptive labels are removed, companies can use packet colouring and design to create the impression of a 'light' cigarette. The most effective policy would be a plain tobacco packet with branding in standardised font, complete with recommended health warnings.

Strengthen restrictions on smoking in public places. Substantial popular support for a total ban on smoking in restaurants, bars and cafes has been met, as it is now forbidden to smoke in most public places. However, careful enforcement is required to ensure that this policy is properly executed.

SOURCES:

Mir, H, Roberts, B, Richardson, E, Chow, C, McKee, M (2012) "Analysing compliance of cigarette packaging with the FCTC and national legislation in eight former Soviet Union countries" Tobacco Control. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/23047889>

Roberts, B., Stickley, A, Gilmore, A, Danishevski, K, Kizilova, K, Bryden, A, Rotman, D, Haerpfer, C, McKee, M (2012) "Knowledge of the health impacts of smoking and public attitudes towards tobacco control in the former Soviet Union" Tobacco Control. (<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22705600>)

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

The MPOWER Package: WHO Report on the Global Tobacco Epidemic, 2008.

English: http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2008/9789241596282_eng.pdf

Russian: http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2008/9789244596289_rus.pdf

CONTACT:

Prof Vil Bakirov
V.N. Karazin Kharkiv National University
rektor@univer.kharkov.ua

Dr Bayard Roberts
London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine
bayard.roberts@lshtm.ac.uk

Dr Alexander Chvorostov
Institute for Advanced Studies, Vienna
alex.chv@ihs.ac.at

For the full series of policy briefs, visit www.hitt-cis.net.

This Policy Brief is part of Deliverable #13 of work package 9.