This policy brief provides results from a nationally-representative household survey of 1800 randomly selected people in Moldova 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. The lack of knowledge also affects non-smokers: 40% of respondents did not understand the link between passive smoking and health.

**Gaps in legislation and enforcement on cigarette packaging**

Although legislation mostly follows the recommendations of the global Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), to which Moldova has acceded, enforcement is poor in four areas.

- Deceptive labels such as ‘lights’ often appear on packets and mislead the public: almost half of respondents wrongly thought that ‘lights’ were less harmful than ‘regular’ cigarettes.
- Cigarette packets carry less effective general labels, such as ‘smoking harms health’, rather than mandated specific warnings, such as ‘smoking causes heart disease’.
- Cigarette packets do not carry warning images. These images are better understood by children – especially children of smokers, who are most likely to start smoking themselves.
- Health warnings do not cover the mandated 40% of cigarette packets.

**Public support for stronger tobacco control**

The vast majority felt that authorities are not doing enough to fight tobacco, and only 2% of respondents support the lack of smoking ban in social spaces. Half of respondents thought tobacco prices should increase faster than the prices of other goods, and there was widespread support for larger health warnings with corresponding images.
POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Educate the public about specific health risks. Knowledge of the health impacts of tobacco are vital elements of behavioural change. Poor awareness of health risks can be addressed by public awareness campaigns and improved health messages on cigarette packaging.

Strengthen enforcement of cigarette packaging legislation. Legislation should clearly identify authorities responsible for enforcement and should include a system to monitor compliance and prosecute violations. Stronger enforcement of legislation is needed to effectively ban deceptive labels, and for larger specific health warnings and images to better educate the public.

Ensure legislation meets FCTC recommendations. Legislation on deceptive labelling could also be stronger, 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.

Restrict smoking in social spaces. The current lack of restrictions on smoking in restaurants, bars and cafes is deeply unpopular. The partial restriction, or preferably total restriction, of smoking in shared social spaces would reduce tobacco consumption and passive smoking and, contrary to the claims of the tobacco industry, such policies have either a neutral or positive impact on businesses.

Increase taxes on tobacco products. At 30%, the current taxation rate is low, but the public are very supportive of increasing cigarette prices. Just a 10% increase in tobacco tax can decrease tobacco use by 8%, and result in an overall rise in government tobacco tax revenue of 7%. WHO recommendations advise that an excise tax per unit of tobacco applied at manufacturer level will avoid evasion and manipulation of the tax rate. Additionally, affixing tax stamps to packets, alongside more aggressive law enforcement, can curb potential increases in cigarette smuggling.

SOURCES:


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