Standardised Packaging for Tobacco Products

Recent evidence from Australia and United Kingdom

DECEMBER 2014

SMOKING CLOGS THE ARTERIES AND CAUSES HEART ATTACKS AND STROKES

WARNING

The toxic chemicals in tobacco smoke damage your blood vessels, damage your body's cells and attack your immune system.

Brand Variant

20

20 CIGARETTES BRAND VARIANT

British Heart Foundation

UKCTAS
UK Centre for Tobacco & Alcohol Studies

KING'S College LONDON

Cancer Council Victoria

itc
International Tobacco Control Policy Evaluation Project

UNIVERSITY OF WATERLOO

OVERVIEW

This report is a summary of the recent evidence on the effectiveness of standardised packaging as a tobacco control strategy. The evidence includes new data from the Australia and United Kingdom International Tobacco Control Policy Evaluation Projects (the ITC Project). The ITC Project has conducted longitudinal cohort surveys of representative samples of tobacco users in 22 countries, with an emphasis on measuring the impact of tobacco control policies of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. Findings presented here include results from the 2012 and 2013 ITC Australia Survey conducted among approximately 1,500 smokers and ex-smokers about 1 year before and 2-5 months after the implementation of standardised packs. Findings from the 2013 ITC United Kingdom Survey conducted among approximately 1,400 smokers and ex-smokers demonstrate the need for standardised packs in the UK and the potential for positive impacts. ITC Australia findings showed that support for standardised packaging among smokers and ex-smokers almost doubled (from 28% to 51%) after the policy was implemented. If the UK followed the same pattern as Australia, we could expect to see similar increases of support. The UK is also working from a higher baseline, as support among smokers and ex-smokers is currently 37% — higher than it was in Australia before standardised packs were implemented. The noticeability of the health warnings approximately doubled from 34% to 66%. The appeal of packs reduced substantially such that more than four in five Australian smokers reported not liking the look of their pack after the legislation was implemented. It is recommended that standardised packaging for tobacco products be implemented in the UK without any further delay. The evidence is clear that standardised packaging is effective and important for public health. For information on the ITC Project see www.itcproject.org.

What is standardised packaging?

Standardised packaging replaces branded packaging with plain dull-coloured packages accompanied by strong mandated health warnings, and restrictions on the shape and size of packs. The only branding allowed is the brand name in a standard font in prescribed places. In Australia, it also extends to removal of branding from cigarette sticks and standardisation of the sticks.

Standardised packs are intended to discourage children and young people from starting to smoke and encourage current smokers to quit.

Why is standardised packaging important for public health in the United Kingdom?

Smoking is the leading cause of preventable death in the United Kingdom, resulting in significant economic harm including healthcare expenditures, productivity losses, and other costs. Healthcare costs to the NHS in England alone are estimated at £2 billion a year.[1]

Marketing efforts are an important reason why tobacco products became the leading health problem in the UK and throughout the world. With increasing restrictions on tobacco advertising, promotion, and sponsorship, tobacco packaging is now a more important tool for marketing. Tobacco packaging is used to make the product more appealing, and this greater appeal can be targeted to different groups.[2, 3]

For example, evidence suggests tobacco packaging with bright colours and sleek designs appeals to children; slim cigarettes in lipstick-shaped packs are appealing to young women.[4-7] Through the use of light colours (e.g. white, light blue), tobacco packaging can also lead people to falsely believe that such cigarette brands are less harmful.[8-10]

Standardised packs reduce the appeal of tobacco products, enhance the effectiveness of the health warnings, and contribute to reducing misconceptions that some cigarettes are less harmful than others.[11] An independent review commissioned by the UK Government and conducted by Sir Cyril Chantler concluded that it is *"highly likely that standardised packaging would serve to reduce the rate of children taking up smoking and implausible that it would increase the consumption of tobacco"*.[12]

Figure 1. Standardised Packaging in Australia
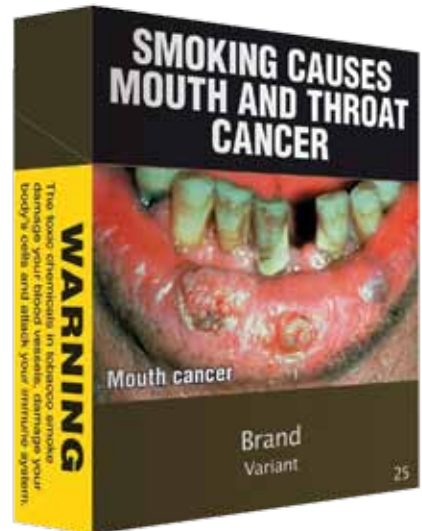
The Case of Standardised Packaging in Australia and Global Progress

Standardised packaging of tobacco products was introduced in Australia in December 2012. Tobacco packages must now be sold in a standard "drab brown" colour, with only the brand and variety name written in a prescribed typeface, with 75% front-of-pack graphic and 90% textual and graphic back-of-pack health warnings (see Figure 1). New Zealand, Ireland, and France have announced plans to implement standardised packaging.

Preliminary Evidence on the Impact of Standardised Packaging in Australia

An early study of the effects of standardised packs on smokers during the initial roll-out found that compared with branded pack smokers, those smoking from standardised packs perceived their cigarettes as less appealing and less satisfying and were 81% more likely to report prioritising and thinking about quitting in the past week.[13]

The number of smokers calling a quitline for cessation help also increased after the introduction of standardised packs.[14] The number of cigarette packs on "display" on café tables declined, particularly in areas where children were present, suggesting an important decrease in exposure to tobacco promotion.[15]

Following the introduction of standardised packs in 2012, adult smoking prevalence continued to decline, from 15.1% in 2010 to 12.8% in 2013 according to data from the National Drugs Strategy Household Survey.[16] The Australian surveys also found that fewer young people were taking up smoking. The proportion of 12-17 year olds who had never smoked remained high at 95%, and the proportion of those aged 18-24 who had never smoked rose from 72% in 2010 to 77% in 2013.

Evidence for Standardised Packaging in the United Kingdom

Are UK smokers ready for Standardised Packaging?

After the implementation of standardised packs in Australia, support for them increased from 28% to 51% among smokers and ex-smokers (see Figure 2). A study examining changes in support among smokers in Australia found that there was no difference in support for standardised packs by educational background, income, or gender.[17] This increase in support is similar to smokers' increased support for smoke-free laws after they were implemented in the UK and Australia. Support for standardised packs is currently 37% in the UK, higher than it was in Australia before standardised packs were implemented. Therefore, if standardised packs were implemented in the UK and patterns followed those seen in Australia, it is likely that support in the UK would rise significantly.

Figure 2. Percentage of smokers and ex-smokers who believe that tobacco companies should be required to sell cigarettes in standardised packs
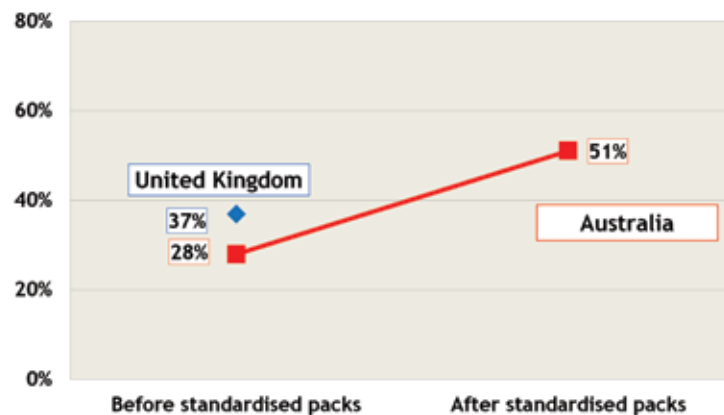
What impact might standardised packaging have on increasing the noticeability of the health warnings?

Health warnings inform people about the risks of smoking and encourage smokers to quit.[18] Evidence suggests that standardised packs will increase the noticeability of the warnings. New findings from the ITC Project support this view. After standardised packs were implemented in Australia, reports of noticing the warnings before other aspects of the pack increased from 34% to 66% (see Figure 3). In the UK where branded packaging still exists, other aspects of the pack, such as branding, are more likely to be noticed first – only 24% in the UK report noticing the warnings first. Similar to Australia, if standardised packs are implemented in the UK, it is likely that the noticeability of the health warnings would increase.

What impact might standardised packaging have on the appeal of tobacco packaging?

Research suggests that standardised packs will reduce the appeal of tobacco products. New findings from the ITC Project support this view. The percentage of Australian smokers who responded, "not at all" when asked how much they liked the look of their cigarette pack increased substantially from 44% before standardised packs to **82% after their introduction, demonstrating a decrease in the appeal of tobacco packaging in Australia**. In the UK, the appeal of tobacco packaging remains much higher than in Australia, with only 38% currently reporting not liking the look of their pack at all (see Figure 4). These findings indicate that implementing standardised packs in the UK is likely to decrease the appeal of tobacco products.

Tobacco Industry Opposition to Standardised Packaging

The tobacco industry claims that standardised packaging will lead to an increase in illicit tobacco. Sir Cyril Chantler's review on standardised packs stated that he was not convinced by the tobacco industry's argument that standardised packs would be easier to counterfeit, and additionally concluded that a KPMG report commissioned by the tobacco industry showing an increase in illicit tobacco in Australia was flawed.[12] Indeed, there is no evidence that standardised packaging is easier to counterfeit, and no evidence to suggest an increase in illicit tobacco since introduction of standardised packaging in Australia; concerns about illicit tobacco would be better met with evidence-based solutions, such as increasing enforcement, which to date have been effective in the UK.[19]

The industry also claims that small shop owners will be negatively impacted by the measure, but studies of standardised packaging in Australia have not supported these claims, including pack retrieval time or loss of smoking customers.[20-22]

Figure 3. Percentage of smokers and ex-smokers who report that when they look at a cigarette pack, they usually notice the warning labels first
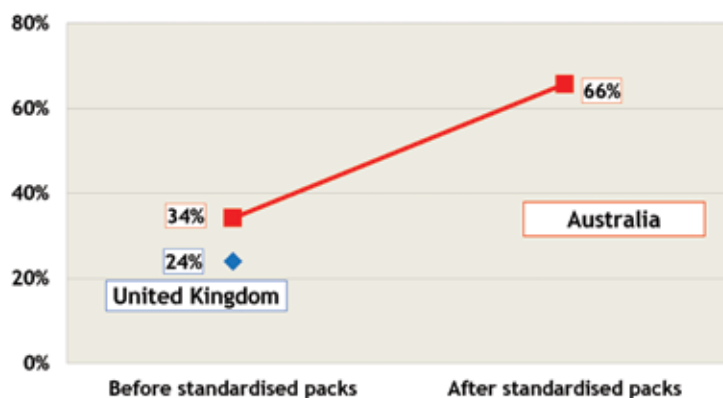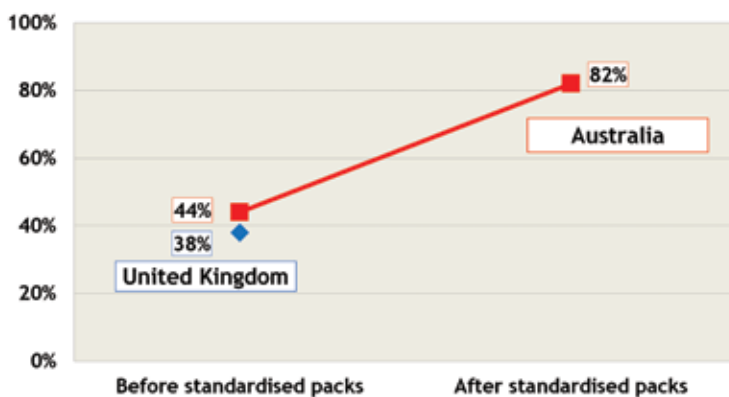

Figure 4. Percentage of smokers reporting "not at all" when asked if they like the look of their packs

Evidence from the ITC Project in Australia shows that after standardised packs were implemented, support for standardised packaging increased, noticeability of the health warnings increased, and appeal of the packs decreased.

RECOMMENDATION

Due to the clear evidence base for its effectiveness and the pressing public health need, standardised packaging for tobacco products should be implemented without any further delay in the UK.

The UK government commissioned Sir Cyril Chantler to undertake an independent review into the possible effects of standardised packaging. Sir Cryril Chantler concluded: "Having reviewed the evidence it is in my view highly likely that standardised packaging would serve to reduce the rate of children taking up smoking and implausible that it would increase the consumption of tobacco."[12]

Sir Cyril Chantler
31 March 2014

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THIS REPORT IS AVAILABLE AT THE FOLLOWING WEBSITES:

British Heart Foundation: https://www.bhf.org.uk/

International Tobacco Control (ITC) Policy Evaluation Project: www.itcproject.org

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