

## **SCOTTISH STUDIES ON TOBACCO PLAIN PACKAGING**

### **Study 1: Young adult smokers' perceptions of plain packaging: A pilot ecological study**

**Authors:** Crawford Moodie, Anne Marie Mackintosh, Gerard Hastings, Allison Ford (2010), University of Stirling

#### **Aims**

To explore the impact, if any, that using plain cigarette packs in real-life settings (ecological research) have upon young adult smokers.

#### **Methods**

Ecological research was employed with 140 young adult smokers, aged 18 to 35 years and recruited in Greater Glasgow (Scotland), who were asked to use brown 'plain' packs for two weeks and their regular packs for two weeks. Over the four week study period participants completed a questionnaire twice a week assessing pack perceptions and feelings, feelings about smoking, salience of health warnings and smoking related behaviours. A total of 48 smokers correctly completed and returned all questionnaires. This was followed by a post-study interview with a sub-sample of 18 smokers, where a semi-structured topic guide was used to assess perceptions and experiences of using the plain packs.

#### **Results**

Trends in the data showed that in comparison to branded packaging, plain packaging increased negative perceptions and feelings about the pack and about smoking. Plain packaging also increased avoidant behaviour (hiding the pack, covering the pack), certain smoking behaviours, such as smoking less around others and forgoing cigarettes, and thinking about quitting. Almost half of those in the post-study interview, predominantly females, reported that plain packs had either increased avoidant behaviour or reduced consumption.

#### **Conclusions**

This pilot ecological study suggests that plain packaging could potentially help reduce tobacco consumption among some young adult smokers, females in particular. Although employing an innovative research methodology the findings are consistent with, and indeed support, past plain packaging research.

Plain packs used in study



## **Study 2: Young people's perceptions of cigarette packaging and plain packaging: An online survey**

**Authors: Crawford Moodie, Allison Ford, Anne Marie Mackintosh, Gerard Hastings (2010)**

### **Aims**

To explore young people's perceptions of cigarette packaging and plain packaging

### **Methods**

An online survey with young people aged 10 to 17 years (N = 658) was used to explore why young people choose cigarettes, perceptions of pack colour, and perceptions of plain (non-branded) cigarette packaging. Young people were also shown an image of three plain packs, which differed by shape and method of opening, and asked which they liked most and thought others their age would smoke.

### **Results**

Price and what significant others smoke were key factors for choosing cigarettes, with packaging also an important influence. More than a third of the sample associated lighter pack colour with weak tasting and less harmful cigarettes, more so females. Plain packs were rated negatively as were perceptions of plain pack users. One in three showed a preference for either a narrow 'perfume type' plain pack or a plain 'slide' pack that opened from the side, and one third thought that young people would smoke these packs.

### **Conclusions**

Packaging appears to both attract young people and mislead them about product strength and relative harm. Innovative pack construction (novel pack shape and method of opening) and the use of colour are instrumental in these effects. The findings therefore suggest that any move to plain packaging should not only consider the benefits of removing branding (including colour) but also of standardising pack construction, in terms of shape and method of opening.

Image of three plain packs shown to young people



### **Study 3: Young adult smokers' perceptions of pack colour, plain packaging and the impact of plain packaging upon illicit tobacco purchasing behaviour**

**Authors: Crawford Moodie, Allison Ford, Gerard Hastings, Anne Marie Mackintosh (2010)**

#### **Aims**

To explore perceptions of plain packaging, plain pack colour and the possible impact of plain packaging upon illicit tobacco purchasing behaviour among young adult smokers.

#### **Methods**

Focus group research was employed with 54 young adult smokers, aged 18 to 35 years, recruited in Glasgow (Scotland). Smokers were asked about their general perceptions of plain packaging and how they perceived differently coloured plain packs (dark grey, light grey, dark brown, light brown/cream). They were also shown four additional plain packs (white, green, light blue, red) and asked which colour they would associate with a list of words, which included words related to product strength (full strength, low tar, ultra low tar, menthol). Smokers were also asked about their perceptions of illicit, and particularly counterfeit tobacco, and the influence that plain packaging would have on their purchase of illicit tobacco; the tobacco industry claims that plain packaging will make counterfeiting easier and cheaper, which will facilitate an increase in purchase of counterfeit tobacco.

#### **Results**

Consistent with past research the removal of branding reduced the attractiveness and promotional appeal of the pack. Dark brown plain packs were perceived as more unappealing than light brown and dark and light grey packs by all groups. Coloured plain packs (white, green, light blue, red) without a brand name, any brand descriptors or tar or nicotine levels, were identified by almost all smokers as signalling product strength, and thus harm. The pack was found to have no impact on the decision to buy counterfeit cigarettes, which was driven by availability and price. Smokers indicated that plain packaging would have no impact on their illicit tobacco purchasing behaviour.

#### **Conclusions**

Dark brown non-branded packaging for tobacco products would help reduce the promotional appeal of the pack and ensure that pack colour does not provide consumers with false comfort about associated harms. The findings question the validity of the tobacco industry argument that plain packaging would influence smokers to turn to illicit tobacco.