Plain Packaging

ASPIRE2025

Research Summary

What effect is plain packaging likely to have?

1. Hoek, J., Wong, C., Gendall, P., Louviere, J. and Cong, K. (2011). The effects of dissuasive packaging on young adult smokers. Tobacco Control, 20,3, 83-88. doi: 10.1136/tc.2010.037861

What did we do and find?
We ran an experiment where we modelled the effect of larger pictorial warning labels and reduced branding levels on tobacco packages. A sample of just over 300 young adult smokers viewed show cards that each contained four images of different packs – the packs varied in the size of their warning label and the level of branding displayed. Respondents identified the pack they would be most likely to choose and the one they would be least likely to choose. We also compared a full plain pack and the status quo and asked participants how likely these images would be to prompt them to call the Quitline.

Participants were significantly less likely to choose a plain pack with a larger warning than they were to choose a fully branded pack. They were also significantly more likely to predict they would call the Quitline after seeing a plain pack than a branded pack.

What does this mean?
This was the first study to estimate how young adult smokers could respond to plain packaging. The results clearly show that, as packs have less branding and larger warning labels, they become much less attractive to young people. Plain packaging will reduce the appeal of smoking and increase the chances that young adult smokers will call the Quitline.

Key Quotes
Plain packs that feature large graphic health warnings are significantly more likely to promote cessation among young adult smokers than fully or partially branded packs. The findings support the introduction of plain packaging and suggest use of unbranded package space to feature larger health warnings would further promote cessation.

Note: This study used plain white packaging, not the dark green-brown colour subsequently tested and adopted by the Australian government. The effects noted would likely have been even stronger had the green-brown colour been used in the study.