

The impact of the point-of-sale tobacco display ban on young people in Scotland: before-and-after study

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Disclaimer: This report contains transcripts of interviews conducted in the course of the research and contains language that may offend some readers.

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Plain English summary

The DISPLAY study

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Plain English summary

Tobacco displays at shop checkouts have been shown to encourage young people to take up smoking. In Scotland, a law was passed that requires tobacco retailers to cover up tobacco displays. The law came into force in large supermarkets in April 2013 and in small shops in April 2015.

This study aimed to assess the effect of the legislation on young people's exposure to tobacco displays, their attitudes towards smoking and their smoking behaviour. It was conducted in four communities on mainland Scotland between 2013 and 2017. In each community, information was collected annually on the location of shops that sold tobacco and the characteristics of their tobacco displays. Annual school surveys collected information about pupils' exposure to tobacco displays; their attitudes to smoking; their susceptibility to smoking; and whether they, their friends or their family members smoked. Annual focus group discussions with pupils explored themes from the school survey in more detail.

The study found that almost all of the retailers complied with the legislation and that the visibility of tobacco products at point of sale was greatly reduced. However, the shuttered tobacco gantries remained highly visible.

After the ban on tobacco displays, the younger pupils recognised a much smaller number of tobacco brands. The pupils thought that tobacco products were less easy to buy and negative views towards smoking increased. Young people also thought that fewer young people and adults smoked, while young people's susceptibility to smoking and the risk of starting to smoke were reduced.

The point-of-sale legislation has been successful in reducing young people's exposure to tobacco, their pro-smoking attitudes and their risk of taking up smoking. However, tobacco as a generic product is still highly visible and available. Furthermore, both the availability of tobacco retailers and the visibility of tobacco products are much greater in more deprived areas.

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