Evaluating the impact of introducing standardized packaging with larger health warning labels in England: Findings from adult smokers within the EUREST-PLUS ITC Europe Surveys


Abstract

Background: The European (EU) Tobacco Product Directive (TPD) was implemented in May 2016 to regulate the design and labelling of cigarettes and roll-your-own tobacco. At the same time, UK introduced standardized packaging measures, whereas Germany, Greece, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Spain did not. This study examines the impact of introducing standardized packaging in England using a quasi-experimental design.

Methods: Data from adult smokers in Waves 1 (2016; N=9547) and 2 (2018; N=9724) from the International Tobacco Control Policy Evaluation surveys (England) and EUREST-PLUS surveys (Germany, Greece, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Spain) were used. Generalized estimating equations were used to estimate changes in pack/brand appeal, salience of health-warning labels (HWLs) and perceived relative harm of different brands in England (where larger HWLs and standardized packaging were implemented), vs. each EU country (where only larger HWLs were implemented).

Results: There was an increase in the percentage of respondents from Germany, Hungary, and Poland reporting they did not like the look of the pack (4.7%, 9.6%, and 14.2%, respectively), but the largest increase was in England (41.0%). Moreover, there was a statistically significant increase in the salience of HWLs in Hungary, Poland, and Romania (17.0%, 13.9%, and 15.3%, respectively), but the largest increase was in England (27.6%). Few differences were observed in cross-country comparisons of the perceived relative harm of different brands.

Conclusions: Findings suggest that standardized packaging reduces pack appeal and enhances the salience of HWLs over and above the effects of larger HWLs. Findings provide evidence and support for incorporating standardized packaging into the EU TPD.

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