Reported awareness of tobacco advertising and promotion in China compared to Thailand, Australia and the USA

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Abstract

Background: China currently does not have comprehensive laws or regulations on tobacco advertising and promotion, although it ratified the World Health Organization (WHO) Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) in October 2005 and promised to ban all tobacco advertising by January 2011. Much effort is needed to monitor the current situation of tobacco advertising and promotion in China.

Objective: This study aims to examine levels of awareness of tobacco advertising and promotion among smokers in China as compared to other countries with different levels of restrictions.

Methods: One developing country (Thailand) and two developed countries (Australia and the USA) were selected for comparison. All four countries are part of the International Tobacco Control (ITC) Policy Evaluation Survey project. Between 2005 and 2006, parallel ITC surveys were conducted among adult smokers (at least smoked weekly) in China (n=4763), Thailand (n=2000), Australia (n=1767) and the USA (n=1780). Unprompted and prompted recall of noticing tobacco advertising and promotion were measured.

Results: Chinese respondents reported noticing tobacco advertisements in a range of channels and venues, with highest exposure levels on television (34.5%), billboards (33.4%) and in stores (29.2%). A quarter of respondents noticed tobacco sponsorships, and a high level of awareness of promotion was reported. Cross-country comparison reveals that overall reported awareness was significantly higher in China than in Thailand (particularly) and Australia, but lower than in the USA.

Conclusions: There is a big gap between China and the better-performing countries such as Thailand and Australia regarding tobacco promotion restrictions. China needs to do more, including enhanced policy and more robust enforcement.

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