

Smokers' reactions to the new larger health warning labels on plain cigarette packs in Australia: Findings from the ITC Australia Project

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Abstract

OBJECTIVES: This study examined whether larger sized Australian cigarette health warning labels (HWLs) with plain packaging (PP) were associated with increased desirable reactions towards the HWLs postimplementation.

METHODS: Data were from the International Tobacco Control (ITC) longitudinal cohort survey assessing Australian smokers one wave prior to the policy change in 2011 (n=1104) and another wave after the policy change in 2013 (n=1093). We assessed initial attentional orientation (AO) to or away from warnings, plus other reactions, including cognitive reactions towards the HWLs and quit intentions.

RESULTS: As expected, AO towards the HWLs and reported frequency of noticing warnings increased significantly after the policy change, but not more reading. Smokers also thought more about the harms of smoking and avoided the HWLs more after the policy change, but frequency of forgoing cigarettes did not change. The subgroup that switched from initially focusing away to focusing on the HWLs following the policy change noticed and read the HWLs more, and also thought more about the harmful effects of smoking, whereas the subgroup (5.4%) that changed to focusing away from the HWLs showed opposite effects. We tested the mediational model of Yong et al and confirmed it for predicting quit intentions, with larger effects post-policy.

CONCLUSIONS: Increasing the size of HWLs and introducing them on PP in Australia appears to have led to an overall increase in desired levels and strength of some reactions, but evidence of reactance was among a small minority.

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