Menthol Cigarette Packaging Across Nine Middle-income Countries

Olufemi Erinoso, MPH; Kevin Welding, PhD; Katherine Clegg Smith, PhD; Joanna Cohen, PhD

Background

- Menthol is the most widely used flavor in tobacco products
- In addition to its distinctive taste, it contributes to increased initiation and smoking dependence and reduced cessation
- Assessing the design features and marketing appeals on cigarette packs can help us identify the strategies tobacco companies use to promote menthol cigarettes
- We describe the features and appeals on menthol cigarette packs from nine countries

Methods

- We purchased unique cigarette packs in Bangladesh, Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Philippines, Russia, Thailand and Vietnam using a systematic protocol between 2015 - 2017
- 2,337 cigarette packs were double-coded for design features and appeals including: the two primary pack colors; flavor terminology and imagery; number and color of capsule depictions; and capsule descriptors
- We identified menthol products based on menthol or mint terminology (e.g. premium menthol, mint blast) or imagery (e.g., mint leaves) on the pack

Results

- 203 packs (8.7%) were categorized as menthol
- The most frequently observed primary pack color for menthol cigarettes was green (67%)
- Fifty-three (23%) of the 203 menthol cigarette packs collected had a flavor capsule
- Of the menthol packs with a capsule, 45 (85%) had one capsule
- Forty-nine of the menthol capsule packs (92%) had one or more of the following flavor descriptors: menthol/mentholated (n=21); mint (n=20); and ice/icy (n=12)
- Eighty-nine percent had at least one capsule depiction as a green or blue ball
- Color words (purple, blue, yellow, and ruby) were used to describe flavor capsules (n=10)

Conclusions

- Our results demonstrate the common use of color green on menthol cigarette packs; the use of the green or blue color in illustrating capsules; and the use of color words on menthol packs
- These findings can inform policy efforts towards plain and standardized packaging

Acknowledgements: This work was supported with funding from Bloomberg Philanthropies’ Bloomberg Initiative to Reduce Tobacco Use (bloomberg.org)