Background

• In 2014, India’s Health Minister issued a notification that would increase the size of health warning labels (HWLs) to 85% of the front and back of each tobacco pack
• Implementation, however, was delayed for more than a year as a result of industry interference
• This study aimed to understand the processes and determinants that led to the successful implementation of 85% HWLs in India

Methods

• A mixed methods case study approach was used
• Between June and September 2017, data were gathered from documents (N=68) and key informants (N=22) who played a key role in the passage and/or implementation of the 85% HWLs; these informants included individuals from the media, government agencies, the Supreme Court, non-government organizations and multi-lateral organizations
• Questions pertaining to the tactics and arguments used by proponents and opponents were asked
• All data were analyzed using inductive and deductive coding

Results

• The appointment of a physician and tobacco control advocate as Health Minister in 2014 served as an external shock to the system, providing proponents with an opportunity for action
• These proponents worked in partnership towards a common goal, meeting on a regular basis to discuss plans of action and to ensure that everyone was in sync. Together, they launched a targeted advocacy campaign which focused on three complementary tactics: litigation, media advocacy, and lobbying
• A keen understanding of the scientific literature and the context helped proponents frame their tactics and arguments more effectively, allowing them to defeat the fragmented opponents when the Supreme Court ordered the implementation of HWLs in 2016

Conclusions

Advocates need to equip themselves with a thorough understanding of the scientific evidence surrounding the harms of tobacco use and the effectiveness of the policy they are vying for. Moreover, this case sheds light on the need to cultivate a rigorous understanding of the political context, work in partnership to align strategies and capitalize on each other’s strengths, and involve a skilled legal team that is prepared to battle it out in the courts.

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