Background

- "Low" and "ultra-low" tar cigarette sales are projected to increase in South Korea
- South Korea bans the use of misleading descriptors, but requires the quantitative reporting of cigarette constituents, such as tar, contrary to FCTC Article 11
- The presence of these figures could lead consumers to believe that some cigarettes are safer than others

Objective: To examine the prevalence of misleading numbers on cigarette packs in South Korea

Methods

- In August 2018, unique cigarette packs were collected from nine neighborhoods (4 middle- and 5 high-income) in Seoul, and 4 neighborhoods (1 middle- and 3 high-income) in Busan
- Neighborhoods were selected based on where affluent, young adults resided and frequented, including but not limited to university campuses and nightlife districts
- 178 unique cigarette packs with the current HWL were purchased using a systematic protocol and double-coded

Results

Machine reported tar values and the presence of additional tar values on the pack

- 178 packs (100%) displayed a machine reported a tar value
- KT&TG (n=36) products represented 54% of all 1mg packs
- 109 packs (61%) had an additional tar value displayed
- 96% of JTI (n=23/24) products; 69% of BAT (n=22/32) products; 59% of PMI (n=20/34) products; and 50% of KT&TG (n=44/88) products displayed an additional tar value on the cigarette package

Conclusions

- Tobacco companies overwhelmingly display a 1 or 1mg on cigarette packages compared to other machine reported tar levels
- This branding might imply to consumers that one brand is less harmful than another
- Policymakers must take into account these cigarette packaging design elements in order to protect the public from potentially misleading claims

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