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## Original Research

# Young people's exposure to point-of-sale tobacco products and promotions

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## ABSTRACT

**Objectives:** Point of sale (POS) displays are one of the most important forms of tobacco marketing still permitted in many countries. Reliable methods for measuring exposure to such displays are needed in order to assess their potential impact, particularly on smoking attitudes and uptake among young people. In this study we use a novel method for evaluating POS exposure based on young people's use of retail outlets and recall of tobacco displays and observational data on the characteristics of displays.

**Study design:** Observational audit of retail outlets ( $n = 96$ ) and school-based pupil survey ( $n = 1482$ ) in four Scottish communities reflecting different levels of social deprivation and urbanisation, conducted in 2013 before legislation to remove POS displays was implemented in supermarkets.

**Methods:** Measures were taken of: visibility and placement of tobacco displays; internal and external advertising; display unit size, branding and design; visibility of pack warnings; proximity of tobacco products to products of potential interest to children and young people; pupils' self-reported frequency of visiting retail outlets; and pupils' recall of tobacco displays. Variation in POS exposure across social and demographic groups was assessed.

List of abbreviations: POS, Point of sale; CTNs, Confectioners, tobacconists and newsagents.

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**Results:** Displays were highly visible within outlets and, in over half the stores, from the public footway outside. Tobacco products were displayed in close proximity to products of interest to children (e.g. confectionery, in 70% of stores). Eighty percent of pupils recalled seeing tobacco displays, with those from deprived areas more likely to recall displays in small shops. When confectioners, tobacconists and newsagents (CTNs) and grocery/convenience stores (two of the outlet types most often visited by young people) were examined separately, average tobacco display unit sizes were significantly larger in those outlets in more deprived areas.

**Conclusions:** POS displays remain a key vector in most countries for advertising tobacco products, and it is important to develop robust measures of exposure. The data reported in this paper provide a baseline measure for evaluating the efficacy of legislation prohibiting such displays.

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## Introduction

Point-of-sale (POS) displays of tobacco products in retail outlets, often on specially designed shelving, are important to tobacco manufacturers because they are one of the few remaining marketing methods still permitted in many countries.<sup>1–3</sup> Described as ‘power walls’,<sup>4</sup> they are designed to be attractive and eye-catching, and are located in prominent positions with high traffic flow. They are often placed alongside everyday products thus helping to normalise the idea of tobacco use.<sup>5</sup> Previous studies have found that exposure to POS tobacco displays can stimulate impulse purchase of cigarettes by existing smokers<sup>6,7</sup> and increase the risk of uptake of adolescent smoking.<sup>8–12</sup> Studies which have attempted to identify the mechanisms through which exposure to POS tobacco displays might affect uptake by young people have suggested that exposure to displays influences young people's perceptions of the attractiveness of cigarette packs and smoking and also their smoking norms (i.e. perceptions of prevalence among one's peers), both of which are recognised factors which increase the likelihood of starting smoking.<sup>9,13</sup> Exposure to POS displays can also inhibit smoking cessation attempts by triggering cravings in smokers who are trying to quit.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, it is possible that differences in exposure to POS displays between high and low income neighbourhoods may partially account for well-documented social inequalities in smoking initiation and prevalence.

Article 13 of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, which came into force in 2005, advocates the complete ban on any display of tobacco products at points of sale.<sup>15</sup> Less than half of the 180 signatories currently have in place legislation to restrict advertising at POS, and only around a dozen have comprehensive bans on any display of tobacco products. It is estimated that around 80% of the world's population is exposed to tobacco displays at point of sale.<sup>16</sup>

Research to date into exposure to POS displays has either measured consumers' recall and perceptions of displays<sup>9</sup> or used observational methods to describe the key display characteristics.<sup>17–19</sup> However, observational studies have often examined only a limited range of retail outlets in which

tobacco is sold or have taken only limited measures of display characteristics.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, the development of more reliable methods for the measurement of exposure to displays is important both to assess their potential impact on young people's attitudes to smoking and smoking initiation and to evaluate the impact of legislation to ban POS tobacco marketing.

The data presented here were collected as part of Determining the Impact of Smoking Point of Sale Legislation Among Youth (DISPLAY) study. This is a longitudinal study designed to evaluate Section 1 of the Tobacco and Primary Medical Services (Scotland) Act 2010 which prohibits point of sale tobacco displays by tobacco retailers in Scotland.<sup>21</sup> The legislation came into force in large supermarkets over 280 m<sup>2</sup> on 29th April 2013 and in smaller retailers on 6th April 2015. The legislation requires that all tobacco products and smoking-related products covered by the ban must be put out of public sight. Retailers can choose their own means of covering or removing products, and when covers are removed temporarily for customer service or re-stocking, the area of open display should not exceed 1000 cm<sup>2</sup>. The term ‘display’ in this paper refers to tobacco products displayed on shelf units at point-of-sale. Advertising of tobacco products, including at point of sale, was prohibited in the UK in 2002 by the Tobacco Advertising and Promotion Act 2002.<sup>22</sup>

In this paper we describe a method for accurately measuring tobacco displays at POS and outline two measures of exposure based on young people's ‘opportunity to see’ displays (self-reported frequency of visits to retail outlets where tobacco is sold) and their recall of seeing the displays. Used in combination these three measures allow a comprehensive assessment of exposure to POS tobacco marketing. We then go on to examine the relationship between the different measures of exposure and socio-economic variables.

## Methods

The DISPLAY study has a multimodal before-and-after design using mixed methods to collect data in four purposively

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