Real-world effectiveness of national tobacco advertising bans among smokers: A comparison of six EU-countries from the EUREST-PLUS Project

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Purpose
Comprehensive tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship (TAPS) bans are known to effectively reduce smoking prevalence. We aimed to study country-differences in self-reported exposure to tobacco advertising in general, and in various media and localities (TV, radio, print, social media/internet, posters/billboards, bars/pubs, points of sale, events) in relation to national TAPS legislation in six EU countries.

Methods
We used data from the Wave 1 of the International Tobacco Control 6 European Country (ITC 6E) Project, comprising n=6000 adult smokers from Germany, Greece, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Spain. Country-specific prevalence and 95 %-confidence intervals of self-reported tobacco advertising exposure were examined in relation to national TAPS legislation.

Results
Overall, 34.4 % (95 %-CI: 33.3–35.7) of smokers reported to have noticed things that promote smoking (including advertising) in the last 6 months, with exposure varying from 15.4 % (13.1–17.6) in Hungary to 53.4 % (50.3–56.5) in Germany. Self-reported exposure to tobacco advertising was lowest on the radio (3.5 %, 3.1–4.0), and highest at points of sale (17.9 %, 17.0–18.9), with wide variation across countries. Exposure tended to be higher in countries with less comprehensive TAPS legislation and vice versa, indicating a correlation. Support of certain bans on tobacco advertising was lowest in countries with highest percentages of smokers recalling having noticed things that promote smoking (such as Germany and Spain).

Conclusions
Exposure to tobacco advertising varied widely between countries. Despite the cross-sectional design precluding causal conclusions, the findings indicate a negative association between comprehensiveness of TAPS legislation and exposure to tobacco advertising. However, significant exposure was found even in countries with more comprehensive TAPS legislation, indicating a need for stronger enforcement and closing of loopholes.

Figure 1: Awareness of tobacco advertising, overall, in various media and localities, and support of a complete ban on tobacco advertising inside points of sale (POS).

Figure 2: Awareness of cigarette displays inside points of sale (POS), and support of a complete ban on cigarette displays inside POS.