

The Growing Menace of Flavored Tobacco in Low- and Middle-Income Countries

Around 80% of the world's tobacco users live in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). Many LMICs are signatories to the World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC), the world's first global health treaty, but their tobacco control efforts are consistently undermined by the tobacco industry. More action and research is needed to halt the LMIC tobacco epidemic.

Concerns about flavors

Flavored cigarettes seem to be a common “starter” product, especially among young people. Capsule cigarettes, where capsules inside the cigarette filter can be crushed to release a flavor, are a more recent flavor gimmick and are becoming increasingly popular.

Guidelines for signatories of the WHO FCTC recommend restricting flavors. Flavors are being banned particularly in high-income countries, but more bans around the world would help protect more people.

Key findings

- Flavored tobacco products are readily available in LMICs.
- Lack of standardized packaging and advertising and display bans increases flavored products' attractiveness and impact. Tobacco companies actively market these products widely, including near schools.
- There was a rapid increase in the pace of market share growth from 2016 to 2017, following flavor bans in the European Union and Canada. It is possible that tobacco companies could have increased their marketing of flavored products, including menthol, in LMICs as sales elsewhere were winding down.
- Tobacco companies have attempted to slow and weaken the development of flavored tobacco ban legislation in LMICs.

About the research

The ongoing tobacco epidemic in LMICs means it is important to understand what is driving continued smoking and addiction rates, and how tobacco control policies can be supported. This study used market data analysis to understand the patterns of flavored cigarette market share in LMICs. Researchers sought to understand how tobacco industry activities relate to these patterns through a systematic literature review and a scoping exercise with tobacco control advocates.

Recommendations

- Legislation is needed to restrict the sale of flavored tobacco products.
- As an interim measure, enacting standardized packaging and advertising and display bans in countries where they are not yet in place would reduce the impact of marketing of flavored products, in addition to the other positive effects of these policies.
- Requiring tobacco companies to provide detail on flavored product sales in their country would help LMIC governments monitor flavored products and their harms.



Summary and recommendations from “Menthol and flavored tobacco products in LMICs: A growing menace” by Zatoński M., Silver K., Plummer S., Hiscock R., 2022

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