Public Opinion on Banning of Tobacco Advertisements and Sponsorship 1995

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Support for proposals on tobacco control:
Government should:

- Totally ban sponsorship of sports and cultural activities: 52% support
- Totally ban all forms of tobacco ads: 50% support
- Ban ads on TV and cinema which retail a tobacco product: 55% support
- Introduce tobacco levy to fund sports and cultural activities: 70% support

Opinion on the Government’s proposals:
Will banning tobacco advertisements:

- Infringe freedom of speech? 25% yes, 48% no
- Infringe human rights? 33% yes, 22% no
- Interfere with free flow of information? 29% yes, 47% no
- Cause public fear? 84% yes, 16% no

Opinion on effect of tobacco advertisements on youth - Do tobacco advertisements:

- Create a good impression of smoking? 61% yes, 39% no
- Encourage trying smoking? 70% yes, 30% no
- Promote curiosity about smoking? 74% yes, 26% no

Note: "% not sure/don't know/who answered" is not shown

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Public opinion on banning of tobacco advertisements and sponsorship

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Two public opinion surveys on proposed legislative changes to control smoking in Hong Kong were carried out in 1988 and 1993 (Reference 1 & 2). In 1988, 58% of the respondents supported the proposal that “All cigarette advertisements should be banned in stages” and 40% supported the proposal that “The sponsoring of cultural or amusement activities by tobacco companies should be banned in stages”. In 1993, support for controls on advertising continued with 53% for the total banning of advertisements in printed publications and on billboards, and 43% for “banning of sponsorship in stages”.

1.2 The Government is now considering legislation to ban direct and indirect tobacco advertising. Objections have been raised by the tobacco industry and other interested sectors which have put forward various arguments against the Government’s proposals. This survey aimed to measure the public’s opinions on the banning of tobacco advertisements and sponsorship and on the arguments being advanced by vested interests against the proposed bans. This report describes the results of a telephone survey of randomly selected subjects, from households throughout the Territory, using random digit dialing in October 1995. A total of 1568 eligible households were contacted and 1099 Chinese speaking respondents aged 15 years or over were interviewed. The response rate was 70% and the sampling error of any point estimate of proportions (%) was 3% or less (that is, the 95% confidence interval for a point estimate of 50% is 50% ± 3%).

2.0 Results

2.1 Increasing trend of support

Two-thirds of the respondents supported (agreed or strongly agreed) a total ban on tobacco advertisements in printed publications (68%) and on billboards (66%). Compared with the corresponding figure of 53% in 1993, the increase was 13-15 percentage points or a relative increase of 25-28%. Fifty seven percent of the respondents supported banning of tobacco sponsorship for activities which are mainly for young people (such as pop concerts, discos, sports activities and movies). The increase over the 47% recorded in 1993 was 10 percentage points or a relative increase of 21%.

There was also a steady increase in the support for banning tobacco sponsorship of sports and cultural activities in stages, from 40% (1988) and 43% (1993) to 58% (1995) (Figure 1).

2.2 Advertisements on television

Tobacco advertisements are banned on television, radio and cinema in Hong Kong but indirect advertisements frequently appear in these media in the form of tobacco related images. Almost half (47%) of the respondents had seen advertisements which reminded them of tobacco products. In the 1993 survey, 43% thought that advertising which recalls a tobacco product should be disallowed; 36% thought these should be allowed and 21% gave no answer. The opinions on the need for controls on any service or activity which recalls a tobacco product were similar. 45% for banning, 34% for allowing and 21% gave no answer. The wording of the question in the present survey was slightly different. In 1995, the majority (55%) agreed that the Government should legislate to ban the broadcasting of advertisements, such as those for non-tobacco products named after a cigarette brand, 30% disagreed and 15% gave no answer. (Figure 2)
2.3 Banning of sponsorship

Only one-third (32%) of the respondents supported a total ban on sponsorship of sports and cultural activities by tobacco companies, but a majority (58%) supported the implementation of a ban in stages (see paragraph 2.1). Seventy percent supported the proposal that the Government should introduce a special tobacco tax specifically to fund sports and cultural activities (Figure 3).

2.5 No counter-productive effects on youth

Objections to the bans have been made based on the argument that banning of advertisements would have the opposite effect to the one desired and lead to more smoking among young people. Only 5% of the respondents agreed with this claim. Instead, most (55%) believed that the ban would decrease smoking in youth. Two-thirds of the respondents did not believe that the ban would influence the smoking habits of adults; 28% believed that it would decrease smoking in adults and only 1% believed that it would increase smoking in adults.

2.4 No infringement of freedom

Various arguments have been put forward by the tobacco industry and other interested sectors which object to the ban on advertisements. However, 77% of the respondents agreed that the Government’s proposed ban was intended for the protection of the health of the citizens and the same proportion believed that the ban would be helpful for the prevention of smoking. The claims that bans would amount to an infringement of freedom of speech and human rights and interference with free flow of information were rejected by about half (48-57%) of the respondents and supported by only one-third (29-35%). Eighty four percent of the respondents did not agree with the warning that such ban would cause public fear (Figure 4).

2.6 Effects of advertisements on youth

Contrary to the claim of the tobacco industry that tobacco advertisements are not targeted at children or young people, half of the respondents believed that tobacco advertisements create a good impression about smoking among young people. A large majority believed that tobacco advertisements lead young people to be curious about smoking (74%) and to be more likely to try smoking (70%) (Figure 6).
2.7 Excluding those with no opinion

It should be noted that about 10% of the respondents gave no opinion on the 7 proposals which had majority support. If these subjects are excluded (as would be the case if these proposals were put to a vote), the proportions of respondents supporting these proposals will increase by 5-10 percentage points. Thus, among those who had expressed an opinion, about three-quarters supported the proposals to ban tobacco advertisements in the printed media and billboards and to introduce a special tobacco tax to support sports and cultural activities (Figure 7).

3.0 Conclusions and recommendations

3.1 There is majority public support for a total ban on tobacco advertisements in printed publications and on billboards. The Government should proceed with the proposed legislation.

3.2 Half of the public support a total ban on all forms of tobacco advertisements. Although tobacco advertisements are banned on TV, radio and cinema, indirect tobacco advertisements on TV are reaching almost half of the respondents in this survey. Because of the majority (55%) public support, the Government should further legislate to ban such indirect advertisements.

3.3 Although a total ban on tobacco sponsorship of sports and cultural activities at present is not supported by the majority, there is increasing support, from 40% in 1998 to 58% in 1995, for a gradual ban. This is also shown by the increasing support, from 47% in 1993 to 57% in 1995, for banning sponsorship of events which are mainly for young people. The Government should therefore as a first step consider measures to ban or restrict tobacco sponsorship of activities for children, students and other young people.

3.4 A great majority of the public believe that tobacco advertisements will create a favourable impression about smoking with young people, lead them to be curious about smoking and to try smoking. They also believe that the Government’s proposal to ban all tobacco advertisements is intended to protect the public health and to support other smoking prevention measures. The arguments, from the tobacco industry and other interested sectors, that such a ban will infringe freedom of speech, human rights and free flow of information are not supported by the results of this survey. In addition, the allegation that bans will have the opposite effect in young people, namely that banning will increase smoking is also not supported. Instead, the majority believe that banning of tobacco advertisements will decrease smoking in young people.

3.5 There is considerable support for the Government to introduce a special tobacco tax to fund sports and cultural activities. Many other countries have done this and the measure has proved to be workable and extremely popular. The Government should introduce such a tax so as to provide an alternative source of funding for sports, arts and other cultural activities and eliminate tobacco sponsorship.

Acknowledgements

This survey is funded by the Health and Welfare Branch of the Hong Kong Government. We would like to thank all the interviewers and respondents for their participation and co-operation.

References


Published by Hong Kong Council on Smoking and Health