

The International Tobacco Control Policy Evaluation Project

CHINA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY REPORT

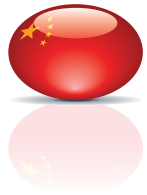


Findings from the Wave 1 to 5 Surveys (2006-2015)

MAY 2017



Promoting Evidence-Based Strategies to Fight the Global Tobacco Epidemic



Findings from the ITC China Wave 1 to 5 Surveys

ITC China

Executive Summary Report

2006-2015

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The complete ITC China Wave 1 to 5 Project Report is in progress and will be made available on the ITC Project website at www.itcproject.org.

ITC POLICY EVALUATION PROJECT IN CHINA

The International Tobacco Control Policy Evaluation Project (the ITC Project) is a multi-country prospective cohort study designed to measure the psychosocial and behavioural impact of key policies of the World Health Organization (WHO) Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC).

In 2006, the University of Waterloo in Canada partnered with the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention (China CDC) to create the ITC China Survey. The ITC China Survey is a face-to-face longitudinal survey of smokers and non-smokers which was conducted five times between April 2006 and July 2015. The ITC China Wave 1 to 4 Surveys were conducted in six cities in China – Beijing, Changsha, Guangzhou, Shanghai, Shenyang, and Yinchuan. Kunming was added as the seventh city at Wave 3. The Wave 5 Survey was conducted in five cities that were included in previous waves (i.e., Beijing, Guangzhou, Kunming, Shanghai, and Shenyang), as well as in five new rural areas (i.e., Changzhi, Huzhou, Tongren, Yichun, and Xining). In each location at each of the five waves of the survey, the respondents were a random sample of approximately 800 adult smokers and 200 adult non-smokers.

As a Party to the FCTC (signed in 2003 and ratified in 2005), China has committed to preventing and reducing tobacco consumption through strong evidence-based policies, as defined in the Treaty text and in the guidelines developed and adopted by the FCTC Conference of the Parties. This report presents the ITC China Survey findings on the attitudes and behaviours of smokers and non-smokers and the impact of tobacco control policies in China to assist policymakers in implementing effective tobacco control policies in Mainland China.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Tobacco Epidemic in China

China is home to more than 300 million smokers, making it the world's largest smoking population. Each year, more than 1 million people die from smoking-related diseases in China, and about 100,000 more die from exposure to secondhand smoke (SHS). Without effective measures to reduce tobacco use, the annual number of tobacco-related deaths in China will reach 3 million by 2050.

The WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control

The World Health Organization (WHO) Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) is the world's first global health treaty, obligating 180 Parties to implement strong, evidence-based tobacco control policies such as comprehensive smoke-free laws, large warning labels with graphic images, bans on tobacco advertising, promotion, and sponsorship, and strong taxation policies on tobacco products to reduce demand. China signed the treaty in 2003 and it came into force in 2006.

Evaluating the Progress of Tobacco Control: the ITC China Survey

This report evaluates China's progress in the implementation of the FCTC and its guidelines, based on research conducted by the International Tobacco Control Policy Evaluation Project (the ITC Project) – an international cohort survey conducted in 28 countries, designed to evaluate the impact of tobacco control policies. Between 2006 and 2015, five waves of the ITC China Survey were conducted among a cohort of adult smokers and non-smokers in China (approximately 800 smokers and 200 non-smokers in each survey location at each wave). The ITC China Survey was developed by an international research team from Canada (University of Waterloo) and the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention (China CDC). The Wave 1 to 3 ITC China Project Report was released in December 2012 (see <http://www.itcproject.org/resources/view/1143>). This new Wave 1 to 5 Report assesses China's progress in tobacco control up to 6 years later and 10 years after China ratified the FCTC, and compares China's progress against other ITC countries around the world.

Key Findings from the ITC China Wave 1 to 5 Project Report

Since the FCTC came into force more than a decade ago, China has taken important steps to strengthen tobacco control efforts. These steps include a directive that prohibits government officials from smoking in public places (December 2013); the implementation of comprehensive smoke-free laws in Beijing (June 2015), Shenzhen (January 2017), and Shanghai (March 2017); a ban on tobacco advertising in mass media, public places, public transport, and outdoors, as well as a ban on all forms of tobacco advertising that target youth (September 2015); and an increase in the ad valorem tax rate for cigarettes at the wholesale level from 5% to 11% (May 2015) which resulted in a price increase.

Despite these important policy achievements, the ITC China Wave 1 to 5 Project Report provides powerful evidence that China needs to accelerate the full implementation of evidence-based measures to reduce the high rates of smoking, encourage smokers to quit, and prevent youth from starting to smoke. The following key findings highlight the urgent need for China to continue to take strong actions to tackle the tobacco epidemic, and protect the current and future health of its population.

Although smoking in public places has decreased in recent years, the majority of adults and children are still not fully protected from the harms of SHS.

Prior to 2015, China had made some progress in protecting people from the harms of tobacco smoke through partial indoor smoking bans in at least 18 cities, as demonstrated by decreases in SHS in public places and workplaces, and an increase in smoke-free homes across the ITC cities. The recent implementation of comprehensive smoke-free laws in several cities in China since 2015 is an important step forward in achieving full protection from SHS in all public places. However, evidence from the ITC Project points to the need to build on this progress further by passing a national smoke-free law in public places followed by strong enforcement.

While awareness of the harms of smoking has increased among Chinese smokers over the past decade, there is room for improvement, especially in rural areas. This improvement in awareness could be achieved through pictorial health warnings and more education campaigns.

Although there has been an increase in knowledge of the harms of smoking, China still has the lowest percentage of male smokers who are aware that smoking causes stroke (40%) and heart disease (61%) among all ITC countries – both leading causes of premature death. ITC findings also show that awareness of health effects is lower in rural areas. In 2013-15, smokers living in rural areas were significantly less likely to be aware of 9 of 11 smoking-related health effects, compared to smokers in cities. This knowledge gap may be due in part to the lower exposure to information on the harms of smoking in rural areas versus cities – almost half (43%) of smokers in rural areas said that they “never” noticed anti-tobacco information in 2013-15, compared to 31% of smokers in cities.

Minor changes to China’s text-only warnings have had little impact in educating smokers about the harms of tobacco use and motivating them to quit.

International research evidence shows that large pictorial warnings are more effective than text warnings in increasing smokers’ awareness of the harms of smoking and motivating them to quit. Health warnings on cigarette packages are one of the most cost-effective health interventions with wide reach – a pack-a-day smoker (20 cigarettes/day) is potentially exposed to the warnings 7,300 times a year. In fact, findings from the ITC China Survey show that more smokers in China get their information about the harms of smoking from tobacco packages than from any other source, even though the health warnings in China are text-only. Despite being noticed by the majority of smokers, however, the text-only warnings on cigarette packs have not been effective in motivating smokers to quit. Between 2009 and 2013-15, fewer than 2 in 10 smokers reported that warning labels made them think about the harms of smoking or made them more likely to quit.

While China's 2015 tobacco tax increase clearly shows that the government is ready to implement effective measures to curb smoking, additional tax policy reforms and price increases are still needed to make cigarettes less affordable for consumers.

Increasing the price and tax on tobacco products is the single most effective way to reduce tobacco use by motivating smokers to quit, and by preventing young people from starting to smoke. Because China's price and tax increases in 2009 and 2015 have not kept pace with rapid income growth, cigarettes have become more affordable over this time period. ITC Survey findings indicate that the vast majority of Chinese smokers are not concerned about the cost of cigarettes. China has the second lowest percentage of male smokers (15%) among 19 ITC countries who "often" thought about the cost of smoking in last 30 days. In 2013-15, affordable price was the most common reason for brand choice – reported by 91% of smokers as one of their reasons to smoke their current brand.

Increasing numbers of Chinese smokers are quitting, but there remain challenges.

Quit rates among Chinese smokers in cities have gone up from 6.0% (between 2006 to 2007-08) to 9.2% (between 2011-12 to 2013-15). This is an achievement; however, Chinese smokers' interest in quitting remains low compared to smokers in other countries – China has the third highest percentage of male smokers (59%) who said that they have no plans to quit smoking among 20 ITC countries. Because cigarettes in China are still very affordable, few smokers report the price of cigarettes as a reason to quit smoking.

In China, both non-smokers AND smokers support stronger tobacco control policies.

ITC China Survey findings show a high level of public support for stronger tobacco control policies, including a comprehensive smoke-free law, pictorial health warnings, and comprehensive bans on tobacco advertising, even among smokers:

- Over three-quarters of smokers and non-smokers across all survey waves "agreed/strongly agreed" that the Chinese government should do more to control smoking.
- Smokers' support for complete indoor smoking bans in public places has increased from 2007 to 2013-15 and is much higher than support among smokers in Europe before their smoke-free laws were implemented. For example, in 2013-15 more than 4 in 10 Chinese smokers overall support smoke-free bars compared to less than 2 in 10 smokers in 6 ITC European countries before the implementation of their smoke-free laws. In 2013-15, over 90% of both smokers and non-smokers said that a ban on smoking in restaurants and other public places would be "good/very good".
- In 2013-15, more than two-thirds of smokers (67%) and non-smokers (75%) said that they would support the implementation of pictorial health warnings.

It is important for tobacco control efforts, especially public education campaigns and cessation services, to reach out to China's large rural population.

China has the largest population in the world, and nearly half of its people live in rural areas. Rising rates of smoking and smoking-related mortality in rural areas in China poses an immense threat to public health and thus should be an important focus for tobacco control efforts.

The ITC China Wave 5 Survey findings show that smokers in urban and rural areas are quite similar on tobacco-related beliefs and behaviours, including smoking in restaurants and in the home, and overall exposure to tobacco advertising. However, the findings also highlight some important differences between urban and rural smokers. Smokers in rural areas smoked more cigarettes per day than smokers in cities and were more likely to have plans to quit. Smokers in cities had greater awareness of the specific harms of smoking and greater exposure to anti-tobacco information compared to rural smokers. However, the impact of China's text-only warnings on smokers' cognitions and behaviors was stronger in rural areas. These findings are consistent with research showing that the impact of warnings may be greater in places where there are fewer sources of health information available.

Therefore, there is an urgent need to target rural areas with more sustained tobacco control interventions, including public education campaigns and cessation support. ITC findings suggest that such efforts would be supported by the public – an important finding from the ITC China Wave 5 Survey is that support for stronger tobacco control policies, including smoke-free laws and pictorial health warnings, is not only high in comparison with other countries, but is also similar among urban and rural Chinese smokers.

IMPLICATIONS FOR TOBACCO CONTROL IN CHINA

The ITC China Wave 1 to 5 Survey findings and evidence on best practices for effective tobacco control suggest that China has an opportunity to continue to build on its recent achievements and progress towards reducing tobacco use. The following recommendations are proposed to further strengthen tobacco control in China:

- Building on Beijing, Shanghai, and Shenzhen's comprehensive smoke-free laws, adopt a comprehensive national smoke-free law accompanied by a strong, rigorous enforcement effort.
- Implement large pictorial health warnings covering at least 50% of cigarette packages.
- Design and implement more public education campaigns to further raise awareness of the harms of tobacco use and motivate quitting.
- Implement regular tobacco tax increases which translate to price increases at the retail level in order to make cigarettes less affordable over time.

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Evaluating the Impact of FCTC Policies in...

25+ countries • >50% of the world's population
>60% of the world's smokers • >70% of the world's tobacco users

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