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## Short Communication

### Cigarette pack labelling practices in Nigeria-Implications for policy recommendations

Abayomi Olukayode

*Ladoke Akintola University of Technology Teaching Hospital, Ogbomosho, Oyo State, Nigeria*

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**Corresponding Author:**

Olukayode Abayomi,  
Ladoke Akintola University of Technology  
Teaching Hospital, Ogbomosho, Oyo State,  
Nigeria  
[abayomikay@gmail.com](mailto:abayomikay@gmail.com)

**Key words:** Cigarette pack labelling, Nigeria, health warning

**Abstract**

**Background:** Cigarette packaging has been reported to be a major means of promoting initiation and maintenance of cigarette use. This may impact on smoking habits in low and middle income countries where tobacco related burden is high.

**Methods:** This is a cross-sectional study of cigarette pack labelling practices in a local government area in southwestern Nigeria. A data collection instrument was used to obtain information from all cigarette packs identified.

**Results:** Twenty different brands with varying pack colours, designs and labels were found. The average cost of a pack was \$1.25. All the packs provided information on tar levels and had a single, non-specific textual warning message “Federal ministry of health warns that smokers are liable to die young” located in the front panel. None provided health warnings in any of the local languages.

**Discussion:** The findings suggest that the prevalence of promotional labeling may be quite high. Future studies may be required to determine the impact of restrictive labeling practices on incidence on tobacco use.

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## INTRODUCTION

Worldwide, tobacco use accounts for the highest burden of preventable death [1]. It has been projected that by 2030, 8 million tobacco related deaths will occur annually [2]. About two-thirds of those deaths would occur in low and middle income countries due to exponential increases in tobacco use [3]. Tobacco control initiatives focusing mainly on cigarettes, have led to reduced rates of lung cancer which is the main cause of all cancer-related deaths [4].

Cigarette packaging constitutes a major means of promoting initiation and maintenance of smoking [5]. The tobacco industries’ marketing strategy of using cigarette packs to promote smoking by has been attributed to increasing restrictions on other forms of marketing especially direct advertising and media campaigns [6]. Though Nigeria is a party to the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) which recommends “a comprehensive ban or, in the

case of a party that is not in a position to undertake a comprehensive ban due to its constitution or constitutional principles, restrict tobacco advertising and promotion”, this has not been signed into law [7,8]. Previous studies suggest that elements of cigarette packaging including shape, design, colours and descriptors potentially influence users and non-users of tobacco [9]. In view of this some high income countries have strictly regulated cigarette pack labeling practices and advocated the use of generic (plain) packaging. In Nigeria, a lifetime prevalence of cigarette smoking was reported in 16.8% of a nationwide survey [10]. A higher prevalence of 26.4% was reported among adolescents in Nigeria [11]. The high prevalence rates of smoking and presence of major multinational tobacco organization in the country suggest that relatively high quantities of cigarettes may be available for consumption. However, little information is available on cigarette pack labelling practices in Nigeria. This study aimed to evaluate

labelling practices in a sample of cigarette packs in southwestern Nigeria. We sought to determine compliance with extant tobacco control laws and obtain a baseline data for monitoring implementation of WHO FCTC about to be domesticated. In view of the burden of tobacco related disorders in Nigeria, exploring this issue would aid better understanding and planning of prevention programmes.

## **METHODS**

This was a descriptive, cross-sectional study of all cigarette packages available in Ogbomoso, Oyo state, Nigeria between September and November, 2012. A list of locally sold brands of cigarette was obtained from major cigarette dealers in Ogbomoso. The brands of cigarette packages sold by major tobacco dealers were then identified and included for evaluation. A structured data collection instrument was developed to obtain information about the labelling of identified cigarette packs. Information was obtained on i colours, promotional and warning labels, principal display areas, tar level and use of deceptive terms. In line with a previous study [12], a label health warning was classified as general if it does not refer to any specific disease. Also, promotional labels were defined as any label that could promote smoking in general or that brand in particular, and included misleading descriptors [12]. Ethical approval for the data collection in this study was obtained from the Ladoke Akintola University of Technology Teaching Hospital, Ogbomoso. No individual participant data was required. Data were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 16 (SPSS, Chicago IL, USA). Results were calculated as frequencies (%) and means.

## **RESULTS**

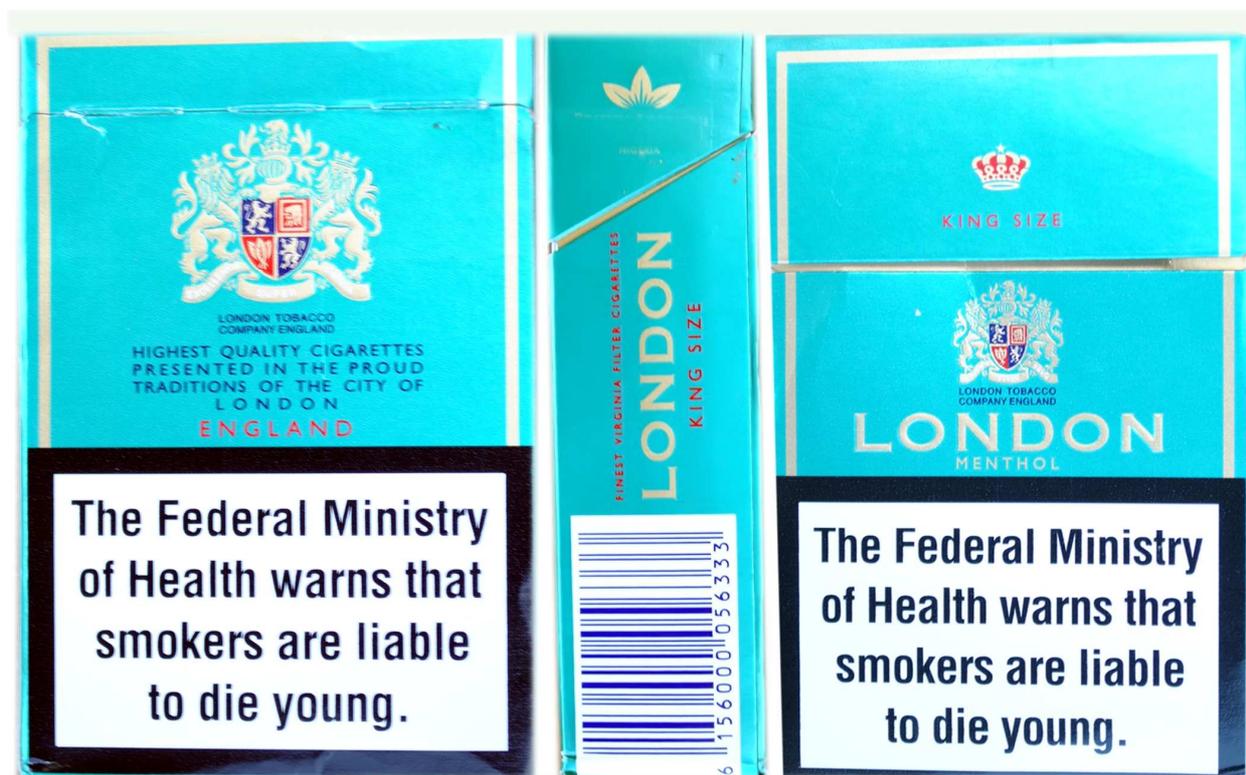
A total of 20 brands of cigarette were available during the period of the study. All except one pack (of 10 sticks) contained 20 sticks of cigarette. The average cost of a pack was \$1.25. All the packs provided information on tar levels and had a single, non-specific textual warning message “Federal ministry of health warns that smokers are liable to die young” located in the front panel. None provided health warnings in any of the local languages. All the cigarette brands used a mix of bright colours. The average number of colours per pack was 4.25 (SD = 0.6). The colours on the packs included black (90%), white (85%), red (70%), blue (40%), green (35%), silver (10%) to gold (5%). Out of a total of 20 cigarette packs, 18 (80%) had used promotional terms suggesting highlighting the quality of the product. The following phrases were commonly used to advertise the cigarette brands: “finest choice”,

“exceptional quality”, “refreshing taste”, “great value” “natural”, “perfectionist” and “gold standard”.

## **DISCUSSION**

This is one of very few studies evaluating the implementation of tobacco control policies in Nigeria. Tobacco control policies have been associated with reducing rates of non-communicable diseases [13]. The study also provides some insight on the quality of anti-smoking messages on cigarette packs and current brand designs in the light of FCTC recommendations. The findings suggest that the prevalence of promotional terms may be quite high. This agrees with the finding of Mir et al. [12]. Brand design may contribute to smoking initiation and maintenance [14]. The type, colour of packaging and use of promotional terms found in this study are elements of brand design that may influence the consumer decision-making processes [15]. For instance, it may aid differentiation of one brand from another or perpetuate brand lines [16]. In another recent study highlighting the important role of package designs in identifying cigarette brands, it was observed that brands are linked to specific social categories, including gender, age and social class [17]. This suggests that individuals that identify with certain lifestyle (eg western) may be more likely to consume certain brands. It is possible that some of these promotional terms and brand designs may have a stronger impact on young people [17]. This may be attributed to the desire of youths to explore experiment and adopt popular lifestyles [18].

None of the packs had more than one health warning nor used rotating panels in contrast with findings in high income countries and extant tobacco control laws [12, 19]. The lack of specific information on consequences of tobacco use may limit opportunities for smokers to relate tobacco use to concurrent physical problems [20]. This may partly explain why up to 84% of a sample of adolescent tobacco users believed that tobacco use was not harmful to health in a recent study [21]. Previous studies have showed that uneducated individuals may be more vulnerable than others [20]. The absence of health warnings in widely spoken local languages and non-use of pictorial warnings are missed opportunities for disseminating information that may aid prevention of tobacco use in regions with low levels of education and literacy. The use of pictorial health warning labels have been found to be “personally relevant”, “effective” and “credible” to individuals with lower levels of literacy [22]. The lack of effective tobacco control policies addressing these issues may contribute to rising prevalence rates of smoking and non-communicable diseases in the country [13, 23].



**Figure 1.** Front, Back and Side views of Cigarette pack in Nigeria showing text only warnings, promotional terms and multiple colours.

The study had its limitations including small sample size and convenient sampling which limits its generalizability. Nevertheless, the study highlights the need to enact and enforce legislation regulating tobacco labeling practices that promote smoking in Nigeria. This may include use of standardized identical packages without promotional labels or colours. In view of the challenges of policy implementation [7], having a simple labeling restriction may be more appropriate in resource constrained countries. The level of economic and political instability impacts negatively on development and monitoring of tobacco control policies in low and middle-income countries. So, the FCTC provisions on use of labels on cigarette packages should be urgently implemented [24]. Future studies may be required to determine the impact of restrictive labeling practices on incidence on cigarette smoking. This may potentially influence smoking prevention programmes aimed at reducing burden of smoking related morbidity and mortality.

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