

## Abstract

**Background:** In the tobacco industry, cigarette packaging has always been a marketing instrument that responds to new trends in fashion and taste, but it also actively helps create and endorse these trends. A combined Health warning on cigarette packages has proven to be the least financially demanding tobacco control solution, which affects more or less all tobacco users.

**Aim:** The aim of the present study is to look into the opinions and responses of Czech smokers in relation to the Directive 2014/40/EU of the European Parliament and of The Council of 3 April 2014 on the approximation of the laws, regulations and administrative provisions of the Member States concerning the manufacture, presentation and sale of tobacco and related products.

**Methods:** The data was collected using quantitative-qualitative online questionnaire survey among the customers of the "Relay". Volunteers were recruited in the shop, consent with study participation was obtained and the questionnaire was sent to their email addresses. Overall, 283 questionnaires were sent out, out of which 276 were included in the final analysis. In terms of gender, women were prevalent (54%), with men constituting 45%. Two individuals left the gender field blank. The mean age of participants was 37.

**Results:** The results imply that the respondents most frequently recall pictures of lungs, tracheotomy, toe necrosis, smoking child and man with erectile dysfunction. The first three of these most frequently recalled images are considered the most repulsive as well, together with pictures of carious teeth and coughed-up blood. Moreover, the results have shown that the respondents more often recall and are able to quote the previous phrasing of black box warnings rather than the current one. The quoted warnings typically linked smoking to death, fertility, cancer and also health risks to other people around the smoker. Warnings related to oral and throat cancer, effects of smoking on the unborn child, lung cancer (9 out of 10), effects on the family and children, and clogging of arteries were considered the most repulsive by the respondents.

The results suggest that 33% of respondents use a cigarette case, 13 % cover the cigarette pack with a sticker and 11% put their tobacco product into old boxes without pictures. 28% of the whole sample actively try to evade the combined warnings at all times. When shopping, 25% of these smokers tend to choose their box according to the picture. Also, 18% of the respondents agree that they face increased criticism by their surroundings in connection with the pictures, 17% think or talk about the risks more frequently, 11% claim that they smoke fewer cigarettes a day because of the combined warnings, 14% now read the black box warnings more often and 42% of the respondents do not consider the risks mentioned in the warnings real. This study is the first research probe into the attitudes and behaviours of smokers in relation to the new Czech legislation implemented in 2016.

**Keywords:** health warnings, smoking, tobacco, attitudes