

Tobacco companies target girls

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Tobacco marketing in South Korea has been deliberately aimed at girls and young women. Research published in the open access journal *Globalization and Health* has shown that transnational tobacco companies (TTCs) are using tactics long used with devastating effect in Western countries to snare new female smokers in Asia.

Kelley Lee from the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine led a team of researchers who studied internal documents from the tobacco industry that reveal the scheme to seduce a generation of girls. She said, "Since the opening of the South Korean tobacco market in the late 1980s, females have been targeted by TTCs as an important source of future market growth and profitability. The rise in smoking rates among females within certain age groups since the late 1980s suggests that these efforts have been successful".

The tactics used recall advertising campaigns carried out in the United States and Europe since the 1920s that link smoking with feminism and the liberation of women. According to Lee, "Product design associating smoking with body image and female emancipation, familiarly deployed elsewhere, have been extensively used in South Korea to appeal to female smokers. So-called "ultra light", "low tar" and "superslim" cigarettes have been particularly effective, falsely suggesting certain brands offer a healthier or safer option, as well as appealing to female concerns about weight gain. Tighter restrictions on the use of such descriptors, alongside public education on the fallacy of such claims, are badly needed in South Korea".

South Korea's cigarette market was opened to the world in 1988 under the threat of US trade sanctions. In 1989, the country passed laws banning tobacco advertising, marketing and sponsorship directly targeted at women and children. During the authors' literature search, they found evidence of the companies' efforts to circumvent this law by, for example, using images of couples in their adverts - something not covered by the country's guidelines, but known to appeal to the female market. One TTC wrote "Although obviously targeted to women, the campaign extension would also not be as overt in markets sensitive to female targeting".

Lee concludes, "The implementation of comprehensive tobacco control measures in South Korea, as set out under the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, is urgently needed to protect and promote the health of Korean women and girls".

Reference: The strategic targeting of females by transnational tobacco companies in South Korea following trade liberalisation, Kelley Lee, Carrie Carpenter, Chaitanya Challa, Sungkyu Lee, Gregory N Connolly and Howard K Koh, *Globalization and Health* (in press), www.globalizationandhealth.com/

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