

Love Island TV reality show viewers exposed to millions of tobacco related images

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Viewers of the popular British reality TV show, Love Island, would have been exposed to millions of tobacco related images, suggests research published online in the journal *Tobacco Control*.

This is despite advertising and broadcasting regulations, intended to protect children from smoking imagery on UK television, emphasise the researchers, who call for more stringent curbs on tobacco content on TV as a matter of urgency.

The final episode alone of series 3 of Love Island, in which contestants living in a Spanish villa couple up with each other to remain in the show and claim the £50,000 prize, was watched by around 2.6 million people when it aired in 2017.

In a bid to find out how well series 3 complied with advertising and broadcasting regulatory constraints, the researchers assessed changes in tobacco content for every other one of the 42 episodes, and estimated viewer exposure to the smoking imagery on screen.

To do this, they used 1 minute interval coding to measure audiovisual tobacco content, categorised as actual use; implied use (verbal references and behaviours); paraphernalia (on screen presence of tobacco and associated materials); and brand appearances.

Audience viewing figures were obtained from Kantar Media and combined with mid-year population estimates for 2016 to estimate

overall and individual 'impressions'—separate incidents seen—by age group for each of the coded episodes.

The 21 episodes included 204 intervals of tobacco related content—20 percent of the total across series 3.

Actual tobacco use appeared in 66 (7%) intervals, and usually involved cigarette smoking by one person; smoking by several people occurred in 10 intervals.

Implied tobacco use occurred in 104 (10%) intervals, and paraphernalia in 143 (14%). This last most often involved plain white cigarette packs (117 intervals), with up to eight visible in any one interval.

Branding was visible in 16 (1.6%) intervals, and involved just one brand, which was clearly identified from the logo on the cigarette as Lucky Strike Double Click, a brand that is not widely available in the UK.

Following widespread media criticism of high levels of smoking in the June 19 episode, tobacco content fell significantly from 12.4 intervals per episode to 8.4 and actual tobacco use from 4.9 intervals to 2.3.

When all the data were combined with audience viewing figures and population estimates, the researchers calculated that the 21 episodes delivered 559 million overall tobacco 'impressions' to the UK population, including to 47 million children under the age of 16.

Tobacco impressions were highest among the 16-34 age group, averaging 6.95 per head, and twice as high among women as they were among men.

The episodes delivered 44 million impressions of branded tobacco products, including 4 million to children.

The evidence clearly shows a link between young people's exposure to on screen tobacco imagery and starting to smoke, emphasise the researchers.

"This study demonstrates that in spite of UK regulatory controls on tobacco advertising, promotion and brand placement, and on condoning, encouraging or glamorising smoking in programmes widely seen by people aged under 18, the 42 episodes of this reality TV show probably delivered 559 million tobacco total impressions to the UK population, including approximately 47 million to children," they write.

And nearly 44 million impressions of Lucky Strike branding "including 4 million to children," would also have been delivered, they calculate.

These calculations are likely to be an underestimate, as they don't take account of online viewing or the accompanying weekly review of the series, Love Island: Aftersun, the researchers add.

They point out that another series of Love Island is reportedly in the making for broadcast this year, and that the programme's format has been sold to several other countries.

"We suggest that programme makers be reminded of their legal obligation on the representation of [smoking](#) in these shows and that regulators take a more proactive line in enforcement to protect children from gratuitous promotion of tobacco," they write.

And they conclude: "More stringent controls on [tobacco](#) content in television programmes are urgently needed."

More information: Population exposure to smoking and tobacco branding in the UK reality show 'Love Island' *Tobacco Control* (2018). [DOI: 10.1136/tobaccocontrol-2017-054125](https://doi.org/10.1136/tobaccocontrol-2017-054125)

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