

Raise cigarette price to lower health risk, experts say

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Minimum tobacco pricing could significantly improve the health of people living in Scotland's most economically disadvantaged areas, experts say.

Researchers are urging the Scottish Government to consider upping the price of the cheapest cigarettes to help reduce the incidence of smoking-related diseases.

Cheap [tobacco](#) dominates sales in Scotland, particularly in the poorest areas, a study shows.

Cost of smoking

The average purchase price was found to be 50p less for a pack of 20 cigarettes, and 34p less for roll your own tobacco, in areas with the lowest average household income, compared with the most affluent neighbourhoods.

The cost of tobacco may be linked to the likelihood of smoking, researchers say, as the country's highest smoking rates were found in its most disadvantaged districts.

Increasing the price of the cheapest products will affect these areas most and potentially lead to the greatest health gains by helping people to quit, experts say.

Scottish survey

A team of researchers from the Universities of Edinburgh, Glasgow and East Anglia investigated how tobacco price varied in Scottish convenience stores. They compared [retail price](#) with neighbourhood income deprivation and whether the shop was in a rural or urban setting.

Researchers analysed more than 120,000 purchases in some 270 stores during one week in April 2018.

Links with deprivation were assessed using figures from the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation, which show the proportion of people receiving means-tested benefits and other government support.

The study is the first to report on neighbourhood variation in all tobacco sales, not just the most popular or cheapest brands.

Controls needed

The most popular tobacco products in Scotland are the cheapest, known as sub value, which made up nearly 52 percent of sales. In the most deprived areas, this proportion rose to 58 percent. In most affluent areas it was 39 percent.

Experts say that adopting minimum unit pricing would deter the supply of the cheapest brands and potentially boost the health of the country's most deprived areas.

This would need to be done in combination with a price cap at the upper end of the market, they added, which would prevent the tobacco industry from shifting tax increases from cheap to premium products to protect the market for sub value brands..

"Cheap tobacco products are clearly very important in maintaining high levels of smoking particularly in the most deprived areas, which in turn entrench [health](#) inequalities. This study should add to policy discussions around tobacco retail interventions including the potential of a Minimum Unit Price on tobacco products," says Professor Niamh Shortt, Centre for Research on Society, Environment and Health at the University of Edinburgh.

More information: Shortt NK, Tunstall H, Mitchell R, et al Using point-of-sale data to examine tobacco pricing across neighbourhoods in

Scotland. *Tobacco Control* 19 March 2020. [DOI: 10.1136/tobaccocontrol-2019-055484](https://doi.org/10.1136/tobaccocontrol-2019-055484)

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