



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

News Release

Issued: Tuesday 9 April 2019

Tobacco shops on the rise in Scotland's poorest neighbourhoods

Young people in Scotland's poorest neighbourhoods are increasingly likely to encounter tobacco products in their area, a study suggests.

A law introduced in 2013 has reduced exposure to cigarettes and related products among adolescents, but inequalities in availability and visibility have increased, researchers say.

The ban reduced the visibility of tobacco products in shops across the country, however the density of retailers in Scotland's most deprived neighbourhoods has risen in recent years.

Teenagers in deprived neighbourhoods are now even more likely to encounter tobacco products than their peers in more affluent parts of the country compared with before the ban.

The findings follow previous research showing that Scotland's most deprived areas contain the highest density of tobacco retailers, and that people are more likely to smoke where local availability is high.

A team involving researchers from the Universities of Edinburgh, Stirling and St Andrews examined the effect of the ban on in-store displays of tobacco products in Scotland – called point-of-sale legislation. This came into force in large supermarkets in April 2013 and in smaller shops two years later.

Scientists studied retailer density by analysing data on all of the premises licensed to sell tobacco between 2013 and 2017. They also studied changes in product visibility over the same period.

The density of tobacco retailers fell initially in all areas following the ban, however since 2015 it has increased steadily in Scotland's poorest neighbourhoods, the team says.

Researchers also conducted a survey of more than 5000 adolescents in four areas to gauge their exposure to tobacco products. They found that young people in the poorest areas were the most likely to encounter tobacco products in nearby shops or on their journey to school.

Policies that reduce the local supply of tobacco products are needed to help cut rates of smoking in Scotland, the team says.

The Scottish Government has set a target of reducing smoking rates in the adult population to below five per cent by 2034. The current rate of 21 per cent has not fallen since 2013.

Ranked among the top universities in the world

The study, published in the journal *Tobacco Control*, was funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR). The research, which also involved ScotCen Social Research, was carried out as part of the Determining the impact of smoking point of sale legislation among youth (DISPLAY) study.

Professor Jamie Pearce, of the University of Edinburgh's School of GeoSciences, who led the study, said: "The introduction of the point-of-sale legislation in Scotland has been very successful in reducing the visibility of tobacco products across the country. However, at the same time we are seeing greater socioeconomic inequalities in visibility and availability. Tobacco products remain available on almost every street corner across Scotland; addressing the local supply of tobacco should be the next priority for policymakers in the UK and beyond."

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