The International Tobacco Control Policy Evaluation Project

the ITC Project

Promoting Evidence-Based Strategies to Fight the Global Tobacco Epidemic
The Tobacco Epidemic—A Major Threat to Global Health

Tobacco use is the world’s leading cause of preventable death, accounting for 10% of all deaths and 30% of all cancer deaths. By the end of the 21st Century an estimated 1 billion people will die because of tobacco use – ten times the number who died in the 20th Century. Over 70% of the tobacco-related deaths will occur in developing countries. In addition to the personal costs of this preventable tragedy, its economic and social costs will challenge the economic growth and stability of the developing world.

THE OPPORTUNITY

The Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC)

International recognition of the significant growing threat that tobacco poses to global health has culminated in the world’s first-ever health treaty – the World Health Organization (WHO) Framework Convention for Tobacco Control (FCTC). In just seven years after its adoption, the FCTC has been ratified by more than 160 countries, inhabited by close to 90% of the world’s population.

The FCTC is an ambitious effort to employ best practices to reduce tobacco-related deaths on a global scale. It calls for the nations of the world to implement strong, evidence-based tobacco control policies including:

- More prominent health warning labels, including pictorial warnings on at least 50% of the package
- Prohibition of misleading brand descriptors such as “light” or “mild” and other methods (e.g., colours of packaging) that lead consumers to wrongly believe that certain brands are less harmful
- Bans on tobacco advertising, promotion, and sponsorship
- Increases in taxes on tobacco products and harmonization of tax rates across products
- Comprehensive smoke-free policies to protect the public from exposure to tobacco smoke
- Measures designed to reduce illicit trade
- Information and education to strengthen public awareness of the health risks of tobacco consumption and exposure to tobacco smoke, and the benefits of quitting

The FCTC explicitly recognizes the importance of research evidence to guide the selection and implementation of FCTC policies. To date, however, there have been few rigorous evaluation studies on the impact of FCTC policies.

THE ITC PROJECT

Research for Evidence-Based Tobacco Control

The International Tobacco Control Policy Evaluation Project (the ITC Project) is the first-ever international cohort survey of tobacco use. It is designed to assist policy makers in the implementation of strong evidence-based tobacco control policies. The ITC Project is a transdisciplinary collaborative effort with international health organizations and policy makers in 20 countries currently, inhabited by 50% of the world’s population, 60% of the world’s smokers, and 70% of the world’s tobacco users. Each ITC survey is guided by a common conceptual model, standard protocols and analytic approach, and includes measures designed to evaluate each FCTC policy domain.

Using rigorous survey research methods and policy evaluation designs, the ITC Project is evaluating the impact of FCTC policies as they are being implemented in many countries throughout the world, including key low- and middle-income countries, where the tobacco epidemic will exact its greatest toll.

The University of Waterloo serves as the lead administrative centre for the ITC surveys, providing project management, research design, survey development, data management and analysis, and dissemination support to ITC countries.

“Tobacco is the most effective agent of death ever developed and deployed on a worldwide scale.”
– John Seffrin, CEO, American Cancer Society and Past President, International Union Against Cancer (UICC)
ITC OBJECTIVES

The ITC Project has established a research platform to guide strong, evidence-based implementation of FCTC policies. The ITC Project evaluates FCTC policies at the level of the individual smoker, identifies the determinants of effective tobacco control policies, and disseminates its research findings to the global tobacco control community, including researchers, policy makers, and advocates. The ITC Surveys are designed to address critical issues in global tobacco control such as:

“Are pictorial warnings more effective than text-only warnings?”
“Do restrictions on advertising lead to sufficient reductions in exposure to industry marketing or must there be a total ban?”
“Will smoke-free laws also encourage cessation?”
“Do discount brands and cheaper sources lower the effectiveness of tobacco taxes?”
“How does effectiveness of tobacco control policies vary by income level—within countries and across countries?”

Current ITC Project initiatives include (see back for complete list):

- **ITC China**: Collaboration with the Chinese Ministry of Health to conduct ITC surveys in 7 Chinese cities to evaluate smoke-free initiatives of the 2008 Olympic Games
- **ITC Europe**: Partnerships with tobacco research institutes in France, Germany, and the Netherlands for coordinated evaluation of smoke-free initiatives, including innovative computer-assisted self-interview research methods
- **ITC India and Bangladesh**: ITC surveys will measure prevalence of cigarette use and other forms of tobacco use including waterpipe, smokeless tobacco, and bidis
- **ITC Mauritius**: Evaluation of the first-ever pictorial warning labels in Africa, and among the world’s largest labels
- **ITC Bhutan**: Evaluation of smoking prevalence and the impact of the world’s first ban on the sale of tobacco
- **ITC Four Country**: An 8-year cohort survey of over 6,000 adult smokers to guide effective policies in Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia including evaluation of new national policies enacted under the U.S. FDA Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act

MAKING EVIDENCE MATTER

Knowledge Transfer for Policy Decisions

A central objective of the ITC Project is to widely disseminate our research findings among policy makers to promote strong, evidence-based implementation of the FCTC throughout the world. To this end, the ITC Project has already achieved the following:

- Provided an evidence base for important FCTC policies in the areas of warning labels, advertising bans, smoke-free laws, taxation, and removal of “light” and “mild” brands.
- Disseminated research findings in leading peer-reviewed journals, through ITC country summaries and policy reports, and at briefings at the FCTC Conferences of the Parties.
- Established strong linkages with international health organizations, including WHO and the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), and governments and NGOs in ITC countries.
- Created a web resource to support the implementation of evidence-based warning labels (www.tobaccolabels.org).
- Established (at Roswell Park Cancer Institute) an international cigarette repository to facilitate cross-country studies of design, contents, and emissions of leading cigarette brands and selected other tobacco products to provide an independent science base for regulation of tobacco products under FCTC.
- Conducted capacity-building workshops for tobacco control researchers and policy makers throughout the world.
- Presented findings directly contradicting misconceptions and disinformation of the tobacco industry in their fight against effective tobacco control policies.

“Tobacco use is unlike other threats to global health. Infectious diseases do not employ multinational public relations firms. There are no front groups to promote the spread of cholera. Mosquitoes have no lobbyists.”

**ITC PROJECT FUNDING AND SUPPORT**

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- International Development Research Center (IDRC) - Research for International Tobacco Control (RITC)
- Canadian Institutes of Health Research
- National Health and Medical Research Council (Australia)
- Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
- Cancer Research U.K.

**FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

The ITC Project continues to explore opportunities for collaborating with low and middle income countries to help policy makers design, implement, and evaluate FCTC policies.

**THE ITC RESEARCH TEAM**

The ITC International Research team includes over 80 tobacco control researchers in 20 countries worldwide. Its Principal Investigators are:

- Geoffrey T. Fong – University of Waterloo, Canada
- Mary E. Thompson – University of Waterloo, Canada
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