

Research, Advocacy & Public Policy-Making

AUB Tobacco Control Research Group (AUB-TCRG)

The Mission of AUB-TCRG is to promote public health by producing and disseminating evidence-based tobacco control research.

The Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs (IFI) at the American University of Beirut (AUB) was inaugurated in 2006 to harness the policy-related research of AUB's internationally respected faculty and other scholars, in order to contribute positively to Arab policy-making and international relations. IFI is a neutral, dynamic, civil, and open space that brings together people representing all viewpoints in society. It aims to: raise the quality of public policy-related debate and decision-making in the Arab World and abroad; enhance the Arab World's input into international affairs; and, enrich the quality of interaction among scholars, officials and civil society actors in the Middle East and abroad.

The transnational tobacco industry effectively hampers tobacco control policy-making in Lebanon

Situation and Background

Lebanon is still considered one of the weakest countries in the region with regards to regulating tobacco use, despite having ratified the World Health Organisation's Framework convention on Tobacco Control in 2005.

Lebanon has failed numerous attempts to introduce a national tobacco control policy, including banning smoking in closed public areas, banning advertising and sponsorship, and placing large pictorial health warnings on tobacco products.

The largest barrier to tobacco control remains the interference of the tobacco industry in the policy-making process.

Why this failure?

This failure by the Lebanese government to introduce or modify policies regarding tobacco control is largely due to pressure from tobacco industry lobbyists and allies, who ensure mass tobacco advertising and promotion and prevent any successful implementation of a comprehensive tobacco advertising law in the country as well as other policies such as health warnings and public smoking bans.

The results of slack legislation

As a result of the methods used by tobacco companies in marketing their products, and the clear lack of legislation to control these products, 60 per cent of Lebanese youth (aged between 13-15) use tobacco products (cigarettes or water-pipes). The percentage of smoking among young women is increasing steadily.

Adult Smokers in Lebanon compared to smokers in the Arab Region

Smokers	Lebanon	Regionally
Male	45%	38%
Female	35%	7%

Key points

Public health professionals and advocacy groups should:

- Become more active in challenging tobacco industry arguments.
- Publicise documents and research obtained from the tobacco industry to raise awareness of the influence of the tobacco industry in preventing the passing of effective legislation.

Government should introduce legislation for:

- Large health warnings (minimum 30% of the packet size), including pictorial warnings.
- A complete and comprehensive ban on advertising of products.
- A ban of smoking in all closed indoor public places.
- An increase of taxation on tobacco products.

Research, Advocacy and Public Policy-making in the Arab World (RAPP)

The goal of the RAPP program is to forge an Arab contribution to global knowledge in the practice of policy-making. It aims to bridge existing policy-making knowledge gaps by documenting experiences, replicating successful ones, and assessing and improving weak ones. Its uniqueness lies in being an indigenous effort by a policy research institute based in the Arab world, collectively with other regional institutes, to assess and improve how research is influencing policy making.

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In 2003, tobacco control advocates championed a law requiring a comprehensive tobacco advertising ban. Despite having gone through discussions within the parliament the law was never passed. Media reports revealed that a document from a tobacco company insisted, "any law prohibiting tobacco advertising should contain a number of exceptions."

In the early 1980's and 1990's, following successful lobbying by the tobacco companies, the government was unable to pass legislation that allowed for larger effective health warnings. Currently, the only warning present on packets is the same one that had been issued in 1995, which reads, "The Ministry of Health Warns: Smoking Leads to Serious and Fatal Diseases."

At the legislative level, there has been more representation in favour of tobacco companies' interests than that of the general public.

In a recent press conference held by the American University of Beirut, health experts and academics stressed the need for tougher legislation, fearing that the current discussions of a draft law in parliamentary committees are not focused enough on scientific, evidence-based research in the matter. They also highlighted the fact that despite Lebanon being a member of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, it has not shown "enough commitment" to the accord, whose policies include increased tax measures on tobacco products, and a total ban on smoking in closed public areas, total bans on advertising, and large pictorial health warnings. ■

“We need total bans of smoking in closed/indoor public places, since designated areas for smoking have been scientifically proven to be ineffective in protecting the health of people from exposure to second-hand smoke”

Dr. Rima Nakkash, AUB Tobacco Control Research Group

Sources of Data

The research highlighted in this brief is based on interviews with key policy makers and the internal documents of the tobacco industry. These documents were first made public by a whistleblower in the early 1990s. Analyses of these initially released documents were published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. In the mid 1990s, an additional 50 million pages of documents became publicly available as a result of "pre-trial discovery" litigation in the US. These documents allowed scientists worldwide to unveil the workings of the tobacco industry through careful and thorough analysis.



AUB Tobacco Control Research Group

www.aub.edu.lb/units/tcrg/

Further Reading:

Nakkash R. & Lee K. *The tobacco industry's thwarting of marketing restrictions and health warnings in Lebanon* Tob Control 18;310-316.2009. <http://tobaccocontrol.bmj.com/content/18/4/310.full.pdf>

WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control: <http://www.who.int/fctc/en/>

WHO/EMRO/TFI *The Tobacco Industry Documents: What they are, what they tell us, and how to search them; 2002.* http://www.who.int/tobacco/communications/TI_manual_content.pdf

For further information about the tobacco industry documents visit:

<http://www.legacy.library.ucsf.edu>

“If the current tobacco control policy status quo remains, [we estimate] that 150,000 children and 350,000 adults alive today will die prematurely in Lebanon because of smoking (or second-hand smoking-related illnesses)”

Dr. Gregory N. Connolly, Harvard School of Public Health