

Public support in Great Britain for policies that target unhealthy commodity industries: Tobacco, alcohol, gambling, and unhealthy food and drink

What this research is about

Unhealthy commodity industries include tobacco, alcohol, unhealthy food and drink, and gambling. These industries use various tactics to market their products and target vulnerable populations like young people. There is a growing recognition that a comprehensive strategic public health approach is needed to reduce health harms from these unhealthy commodities. The purpose of this study was to understand public support in Great Britain for policies that target unhealthy commodities. The study also explored factors that were associated with support for policy action.

What the researchers did

The researchers used data from the 2023 Action on Smoking and Health (ASH) Smokefree GB survey. This annual survey is commissioned by ASH and conducted by YouGov, a market research company. Participants in the 2023 survey were adults (aged 18 and older) living in Great Britain. YouGov weighted the data to make sure that the sample was representative of British adults. In total, 12,271 adults completed the survey, in which they answered questions about the following:

- Whether and how often they smoked.
- How often they gambled.
- How much alcohol per week they drank.
- Height and weight to calculate the body mass index (BMI), which was used as a proxy for obesity.
- Support for policy measures for alcohol, tobacco, gambling, and unhealthy food and drink.

What you need to know

This study examined public support for policies that target unhealthy commodities and factors that were linked with support. The researchers used data from the 2023 Action on Smoking and Health (ASH) Smokefree GB survey. Respondents were 12,271 adults living in Great Britain. Overall, respondents supported most public health policies that targeted the unhealthy commodity industries, especially the gambling and tobacco industries. More respondents supported policies that directly target industries through the use of levies, rather than policies that increase product prices for consumers (i.e., through taxes). Sociodemographic factors (i.e., gender, age, social grade) and risky use of unhealthy commodities (i.e., smoking, alcohol intake above guideline recommendations, daily gambling) influenced support for public health policies.

Information on respondents' age, sex, and socioeconomic position was provided by YouGov.

What the researchers found

Overall, respondents supported most public health policies to reduce harm from unhealthy commodities, especially policies targeting the gambling and tobacco industries. More respondents supported policies that directly target the industries through the use of levies, rather than policies that increase product prices for consumers (i.e., through

taxes). Only taxes to raise the price of tobacco were supported by respondents. Nevertheless, more respondents were open to taxing unhealthy food and drink, as well as alcohol, than those who opposed such taxes. Many respondents supported extending the existing sugar tax to also include other types of high-sugar food.

Respondents had mixed thoughts about marketing restrictions. But most participants (63%) believed that a complete gambling advertising ban is a good idea. There was less support for complete bans on alcohol (38%) and unhealthy food advertising (41%). Health warnings were popular among respondents. About 66% of respondents supported having health warnings on cigarettes, while 66% thought health warnings should be on all alcohol advertising. About 76% of respondents supported health warnings on gambling advertising.

Most respondents (87%) believed that there should be a minimum age of 18 years for all forms of gambling. Almost two-thirds (64%) of respondents thought that tobacco sales should be restricted to those 21 years and older.

Women were generally more supportive of public health policies than men. Older adults were generally more supportive of public health policies than the youngest group (ages 18–24 years). People with less advantaged social grades were generally less supportive of most policies compared to those with more advantaged social grades.

People who smoked were less likely to support public health policies across all commodities. Those who drank alcohol above guideline recommendations (more than 14 units/week) were less likely to support alcohol and gambling policies. They were also slightly less likely to support most tobacco control policies and some unhealthy food and drink policies. Daily gambling was linked to less support for most gambling policies, but higher support for some alcohol and unhealthy food and drink policies. Obesity did not influence the level of support for any public health policies.

How you can use this research

Policy makers can use this research to support tactics that target unhealthy commodity industries.

About the researchers

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Citation

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