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Institute for Global Tobacco Control

Technical Report on Tobacco Marketing at the Point-of-Sale in Chisinau and Balti, Moldova

Product Display, Advertising, and Promotion around Primary and Secondary Schools



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Background and Introduction

Tobacco use is the leading cause of preventable death and disease across the globe.¹ Although global estimates of tobacco marketing expenditures are not available, US cigarette manufacturers alone are estimated to have spent over 26 billion US dollars between 2011 and 2013 on advertising and promotion.² Tobacco companies use deceptive and predatory marketing practices to increase consumption of their products, and to make tobacco use appear glamorous or socially acceptable while dismissing the products' adverse health effects.³ Article 13 of the World Health Organization's (WHO) Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) calls for a comprehensive ban on all forms of TAPS, including the retail display of tobacco products.⁴ Evidence shows that the tobacco industry responds to partial TAPS bans that regulate only certain types of TAPS strategies (such as television or radio) by re-directing their resources to market their brands on unregulated channels such as the point-of-sale (POS).⁵ Numerous longitudinal studies have demonstrated that exposure to tobacco product advertising and promotion increases the likelihood that youth will start to smoke.⁶ The display of tobacco products at the POS has the same effect and influence on behavior as traditional media advertising.⁷ Marketing in retail environments specifically has been shown to increase the likelihood of smoking initiation among youth.⁸ One study found that stores where adolescents frequently shop may contain nearly three times as many marketing materials and shelf space for popular tobacco brands.⁹

The Republic of Moldova became a party to the FCTC on 4 May, 2009.¹⁰ Among Moldova's just over 3.5 million residents,¹¹ an estimated 39.4% of adult men, and 5.1% of adult females use tobacco daily, with 18.5% of boys, and 5.6% of girls being recorded as current smokers.¹² Of students who currently use tobacco products, over half buy cigarettes in a store.¹³ Moldova's current tobacco control laws prohibit tobacco advertising in any form including advertising outside and inside wholesale and retail outlets that sell tobacco products. Therefore, the law prohibits point-of-sale advertising and promotion. This aspect of Moldova law aligns with FCTC Article 13 and the FCTC Article 13 Guidelines with respect to point-of-sale advertising and promotion. Although there is a provision of the Tobacco Control Law that will go into effect on May 20, 2020 banning the display of tobacco products at the point-of-sale, currently, product display is allowed. This aspect of the law does not align with FCTC Article 13 and the FCTC Article 13 Guidelines with respect to point-of-sale product display.

Methods

This report describes a study about tobacco marketing at the point-of-sale in Chisinau and Balti, in the Republic of Moldova. The work was led by the Institute for Global Tobacco Control (IGTC) at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health (JHSPH). IGTC partnered in Balti with Centrul Pentru Politici și Analize în Sănătate (PAS Center), who provided guidance and context about the sampling framework. IGTC designed the survey instrument and data collection protocol. Investigators from IGTC trained 6 university students to conduct the fieldwork and submit daily reports for review in real-time. The study team was in Chisinau for training and data collection to troubleshoot any logistical or technical issues. Data cleaning, validation, and analysis were carried out by IGTC.

Sampling Approach

This study surveyed tobacco retailers in the cities of Chisinau, Moldova's capital and largest city with a population of around 750,000,¹¹ and Balti, the third largest city with a population of just over 100,000 people.¹⁴ Ninety-five primary and secondary schools were selected within the city boundaries, with consideration for the (1) retail density, (2) school density, and (3) ease of accessibility for data collectors traversing the cities via public transportation (Figures 1 and 2). Each school was assigned a unique identification code. An online mapping and distance tool was used to

define a sampling area radius of 250 meters surrounding each school, ensuring that none of the sampling areas overlapped. The study surveyed a convenience sample of supermarkets, convenience stores, small, independent grocers, kiosks/newsstands, cafes or bars, and tobacco shops within each sampling area that sold tobacco products.

Figure 1. Selected Schools in Chisinau (n=85)

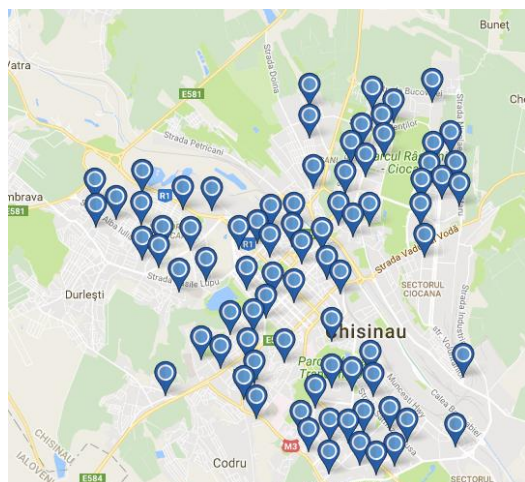


Figure 2. Selected Schools in Balti (n=15)



Survey Instrument

The survey instrument was designed to address key components of Moldova's tobacco control law that allow or regulate different types of tobacco product placement, promotion, health warnings, and sales restrictions, as well as known trends in POS marketing that may target youth (Figure 3). The survey also asked whether the store was within eyesight of the school and provided fields for data collectors to enter the sampling area code, retailer address, name brands of tobacco products displayed or advertised, and other notes or comments about the retailer.

Figure 3. Survey Instrument Content

Unregulated Display and Advertising	Required Signage and Visibility of Health Warnings
Product Placement	Signage with clear health warning labels
Cashier zone	Signage that sales are prohibited to youth under 18
Behind the cashier zone	Visible pack warning labels
Hanging from the ceiling	Prohibited Advertising and Promotion
Eye level of children	Mention of caffeine
On a power wall	Mention of colorful smoke
Near sweets, snacks or soda	Attractive/colorful images
On a branded stand or cabinet	Discounts
Display or Ad Characteristic	Promotional gifts
Signage	Free tobacco product
Mention of flavors and/or vitamins	Imitation cigarette products
Use of lights	Brand stretching
Use of videos	Images of Tobacco (leaf, dried, etc.)

Data Collection Protocol

Observations and photos were collected from retailers during normal business hours from July 13-15, 2016. Each data collector received a packet of sampling area maps including the unique school identification code and space to record the addresses of tobacco retailers in that area (Appendix A). Street names and radii boundaries were clearly visible on all sampling area maps, and data collectors were instructed to use nearest intersections and landmarks to stay within the confines of the radii boundaries. Data collectors began identifying points-of-sale within the sampling area by using the maps to follow a spiral-walking pattern, observing all streets within the 250-meter radius. All supermarkets, convenience stores, small, independent grocers, kiosks/newsstands, cafes or bars, and tobacco shops were selected for observation. The school code, address, school visibility, and store type were still recorded at locations that did not sell tobacco products. Data collectors wrote the address of each tobacco retailer they observed on the corresponding sampling area map. Observational data and photos of tobacco product displays or ads were recorded and uploaded to a cloud-based database in real-time within Magpi, a mobile data collection application installed on smartphones. The mobile app was able to capture the date, geographic coordinates, and data collector name for each record uploaded to the dataset. The order of questions and format of response options were designed to facilitate rapid and discrete observation by data collectors. Data collectors also carried paper copies of the survey to use as an alternative to the mobile app in the event of any technical issue. At the end of each day, data collectors reported the address and sampling area code of each retailer they observed by entering information into a spreadsheet hosted on Google Drive. The study team reviewed these reports daily in order to check the uploaded dataset and ensure that the mobile software application was functioning properly.

Training

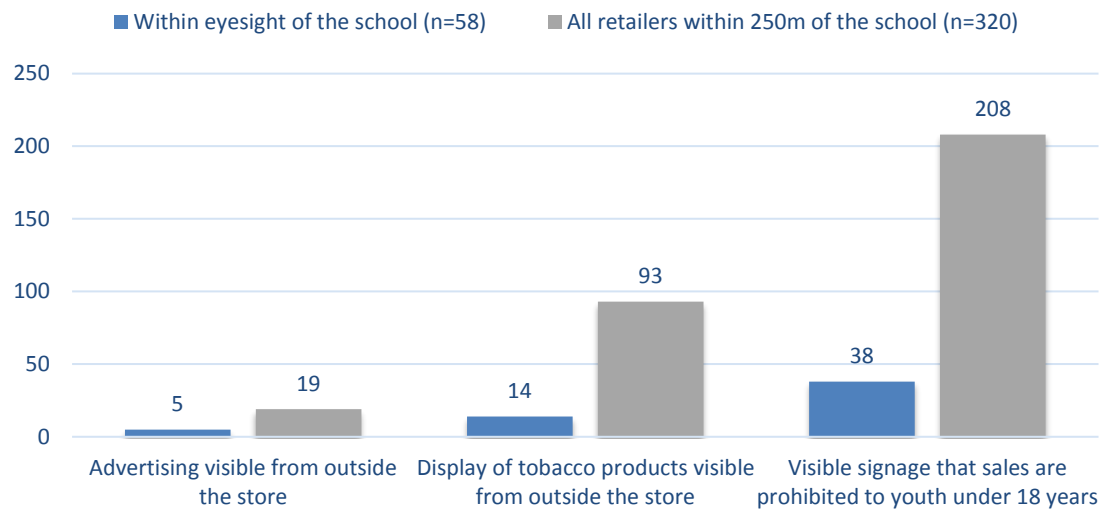
Six university students attended a full day of training to use the study protocol on July 12, 2016 – immediately before the data collection period. The study team explained in detail the purpose of the study, the current tobacco control law, the survey content, key terms and definitions, the Magpi software application, and data collection procedures. Data collectors were instructed to behave as customers in order to discretely observe the retail environment and capture photos. In order to estimate the placement of products at the eye level of children, each data collector used a measuring tape to identify a 1-meter reference point on their body. The data collection team were oriented to the Moldovan tobacco control policies and trained to recognize required health warnings, signage announcing sales restrictions, claims of lower harm or toxicity, and claims that tobacco use promotes popularity or success. During the training, data collectors participated in a field test of the study protocol to practice using the survey, mobile app, and data collection procedures in nearby retailers.

Results

There were a total of 93 school sampling areas observed. Data collectors observed 533 retail outlets within a 250-meter radius of schools – 105 of which were located within eyesight of the school. Three hundred and twenty (60%) retailers sold tobacco. Of the 93 school sampling areas, 88 contained at least one retailer that sold tobacco products.

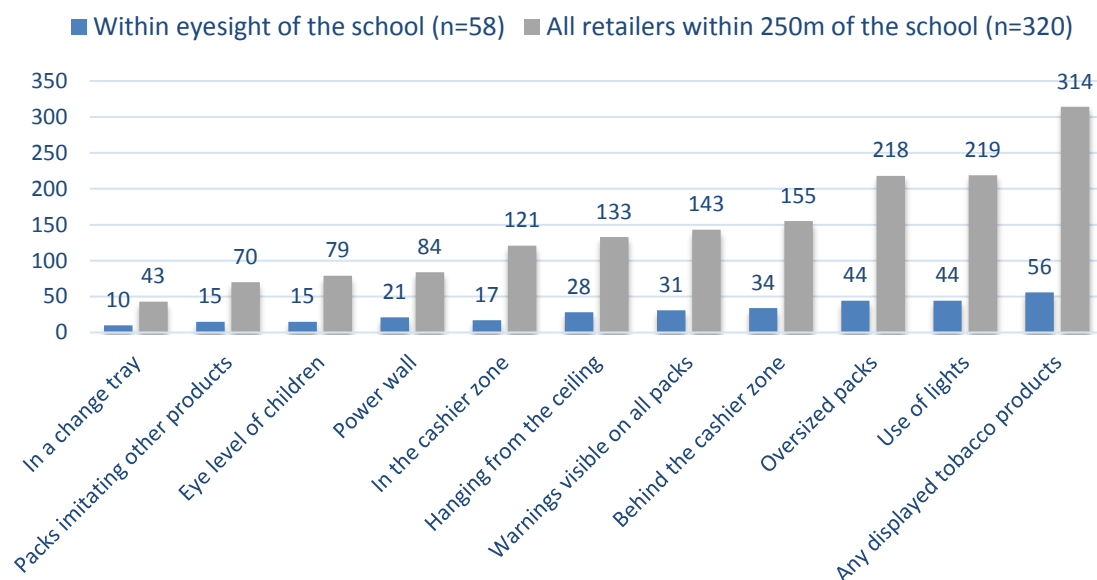
Regarding the display of signage indicating that sales are prohibited to youth under 18 years: of the tobacco retailers observed (320), 208 (65%) displayed signage that sales are prohibited to youth under 18 years. A similar compliance rate (66%) was found for those retailers that sold tobacco within eyesight of the school (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Number of Retailers with Age Restriction Signage, Product Display, and Advertising Visible from Outside the Store



Tobacco products were often displayed in or near the cashier zone. Less than half (43%) of all observed retailers within 250 meters of a school had visible health warning labels on all displayed packs. The majority (68%) of these product displays were accentuated with the use of lights (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Number of Retailers with Tobacco Product Displays



Of particular interest and concern was the presence of tobacco products near sweets, snacks, or soda; almost a third (102) of all tobacco retailers displaying their tobacco products with sweets at the eye level of children (Figures 6 and 7).

Figure 6. Tobacco Products Displayed with Sweets, Snacks, or Soda

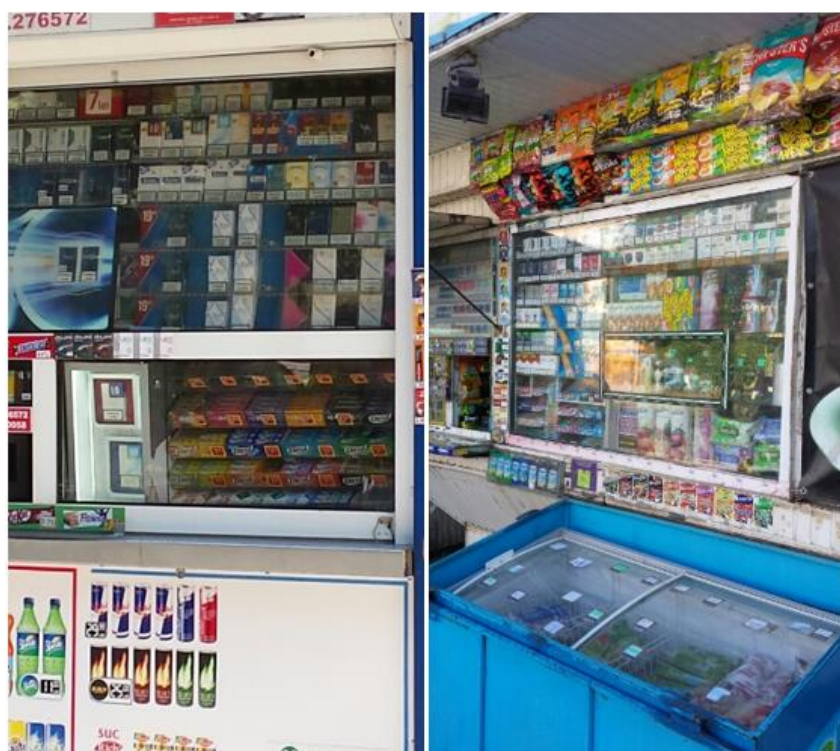


Figure 7. Display of Tobacco Products near Sweets, Snacks, or Soda by Location

	Within eyesight of the school (n=58)	All retailers within 250m of the school(n=320)
In the cashier zone	19	156
Behind the cashier zone	22	94
Hanging from the ceiling	2	5
Eye level of children	10	102
On a power wall of tobacco products	7	25

The current law prohibits tobacco advertising in any form, including advertising outside and inside wholesale and retail outlets that sell tobacco products. Therefore, the law prohibits point-of-sale advertising and promotion. Compliance with the law was found to be relatively high on most fronts; however, the use of elaborate displays, shelf-liners, and change trays with the use of lights and branded coloring (Figure 8) was still observed.

Figure 8. Cigarettes Displays with Lights at the Point-of-Sale



Further concerns included the presence of ‘smoking accessories with tobacco branding’ at tobacco retailers (14%), e.g. lighters, and the use of ‘attractive/colorful images’ at these outlets (58%) (Figure 9).

Figure 9. Colorful Images Used to Advertise Cigarettes



No promotional activities (defined as the presence of special or limited time offers that are intended to result in the purchase of a tobacco product) were observed.

Winston and Marlboro were the most frequently displayed brands of tobacco products at the point-of-sale at observed retail outlets, followed by Red & White and Parliament (Figure 10).

Figure 10. Tobacco Brands Displayed at the Point-of-Sale

Brands Displayed at the POS	# of Retailers
Winston	295
Marlboro	292
Red & White	203
Parliament	182
Doina	37
Nistru (non-filter)	14

Discussion

This study identified numerous examples of retail outlets that display or ‘advertise’ tobacco in close proximity to schools and thus are easily accessible by students. Many retailers did not properly display the warning labels on product packaging, which contravenes the current law by allowing the tobacco industry to utilize their product packaging as a form of advertising when displayed to the public. In many stores near schools these tobacco products were displayed at the point-of-sale alongside products that appeal to children, such as candy.

Limitations

This study used a convenience sample of schools in two large cities. Therefore, the results may not be representative of all types of tobacco retailers or generalizable to all areas of Moldova.

Conclusions

Partial bans of tobacco product marketing allow the industry to exploit deficiencies or loopholes in the law by redirecting their resources to mediums that are not regulated. This study demonstrates that harmful products are displayed within elaborate displays that serve as advertisements in areas that are visible and accessible to minors. A complete ban of tobacco product display, advertising, and promotion in retail locations would comply with FCTC recommendations and more effectively protect the public from tobacco products.

Key Terms and Definitions

Advertising signage: branded print or digital/electronic media such as posters, banners, flyers, or shelf liners that are intended to promote awareness and favorable opinions of a tobacco brand or product

Brand stretching: the presence of non-tobacco items that carry a tobacco brand name

Cashier zone: directly on top of, in front of, or to the side of the counter or cash register where consumers make a purchase

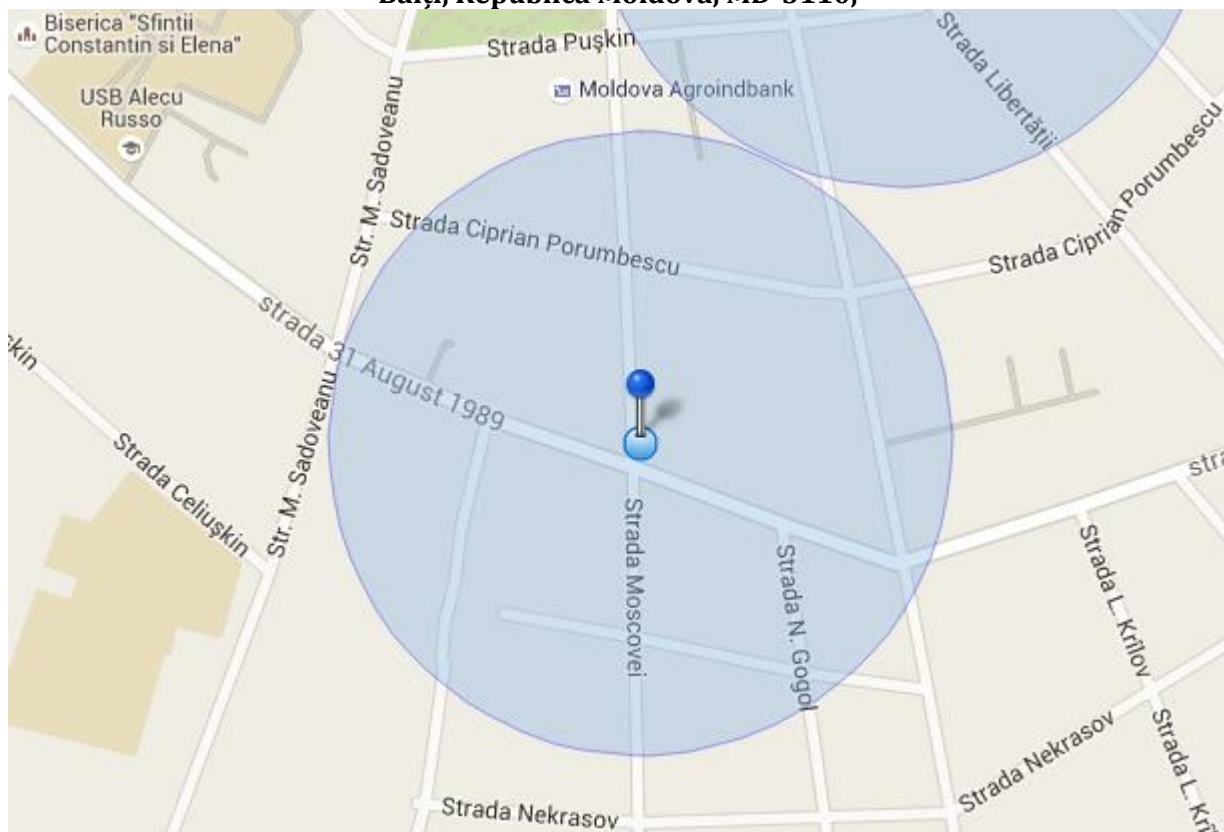
Eye level of children: placement of products 1 meter or less from the ground

Power wall: an excessive display of tobacco products showing multiple packs on multiple shelves

Product display: physical packs of tobacco products that are visible to potential consumers

Appendix A. School Sampling Area Map

252, Colegiul Muzical-Pedagogic, str. C. Porumbescu, 18,
Bălți, Republica Moldova, MD-3110,



Please record the address of each store you observe. If needed, continue lettering and addresses on next page.

A.	F.
B.	G.
C.	H.
D.	I.
E.	J.

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