

Background

Low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) face a disproportionate disease burden from **secondhand smoke** (SHS) exposure. Limited research examines smoke-free policies in LMICs and how they are communicated by media. This study examines how online news in LMICs discuss existing **smoke-free policies and their implementation** to inform successful media communication for tobacco control.

Methods

- Used the tobacco news surveillance platform **Tobacco Watcher** (tobaccowatcher.org) to search articles published from March 2022–September 2023 in 10 LMICs
- Used built-in topic “air” (referring to smoke-free policy) and search terms “implementation” or “compliance”
- Included articles that substantially discussed (i.e., mentioned in multiple paragraphs) or held a clear position on smoke-free policy
- Two trained coders independently coded articles until reaching 80% agreement or higher

Results

- Among 634 articles retrieved, 345 met the inclusion criteria
- Most (81%, n=276) supported implementation of existing smoke-free policies
- 31% (n=107) viewed current implementation efforts as unsuccessful, citing lack of enforcement, signage, and other violations
- 21% (n=74) suggested a need for stronger smoke-free policies, including the elimination of designated smoking areas
- 20% (n=70) considered implementation to be successful
- Common argument messengers: government agencies (84%, n=291), organizations other than WHO such as civil society (40%, n=139), WHO (19%, n=67), researchers or experts (18%, n=62)

Conclusions

- This study **provides insight** into the landscape of online news on smoke-free policy implementation in LMICs, including challenges, lessons, and opportunities:
- Overall media discourse **strongly supported** complete smoking bans and active implementation, citing need to protect public health and children and decrease disease and economic burden
 - Narratives addressing such barriers as lacking enforcement, insufficient policy, and cultural norms points to **continued implementation challenges and need for stronger policies**
 - Strategic use of news media may serve to counter tobacco industry narratives and **amplify evidence and support** for lifesaving smoke-free legislation in LMICs

Most news articles **supported**
100% smoke-free public places,
and policy implementation discourse
generally **aligned** with WHO goals—
suggesting opportunities to
leverage news media to
support tobacco control in LMICs

Tobacco Watcher: Countries and Search Results



About IGTC:
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None.

