

Review of: "Purchasing and sourcing of e-cigarettes among youth in Scotland and England following Scotland's implementation of an e-cigarette retail register and prohibition of e-cigarette sales to under-18s"

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Potential competing interests: I am familiar with the authors and their work, I have collaborated with more than one of them in the past. I am not currently collaborating with any of them.

Thank you for the invitation to review this interesting and timely study. I am not in a position to comment on the methodology or the rigour of the analysis as the authors are all better qualified than I in this regard. There is much to welcome in this paper. The authors are known for their authority and rigour in this area of work. The International Tobacco Control study was designed to compare the impact of tobacco policies across different jurisdictions through directly comparable data and this is a great strength. This question seems ideally suited to the OTC.

The paper's subject matter is timely and topical and the choice of a difference-in-difference methodology with two near neighbours with otherwise very similar regulatory systems and nicotine markets, seems to me to be very well suited to the question. The question is well expressed and the analysis was pre-registered. The data is set out with clarity and is very easy to read and understand even for this reader of only moderate skill. My own professional role is not primarily in data analysis but on advising policy makers on the implications of the evidence. The clarity of the structure, language, presentation of the data, and implications for practice, therefor was extremely welcome.

In a field where too often researchers find precisely what they set out to find, this paper is welcome for the candour with which the authors recognise that their findings were contrary to their hypothesis. This only adds to the credibility of the team and the findings.

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My one suggestion would be to give greater attention to **smoking behaviour** as an outcome of interest. It could be argued that the impact of the regulation of non tobacco nicotine products on tobacco consumption is even more important than the impact it has on the use of the products under regulation. The long-term health harms from e-cigarette use remain the subject of investigation and speculation, whereas the harm from smoking is well documented and most experts would agree with the US NASEM finding that the available evidence suggests that e-cigarettes use is likely to be far less harmful than tobacco smoking, although more research is needed. So, the most certain impact these regulations will have on health depends on whether they increase or decrease tobacco use. Either outcome is plausible and neither is certain.

Some data on smoking is presented and it appears to me that the low numbers of smokers in the sample mean that no effect can be observed with confidence. Brief clarification of that would be useful and I would suggest that smoking behaviour be considered as an outcome of interest in their further studies, which I await with interest. The authors may disagree and I would be interested to hear their reasons for doing so.