

Tobacco Companies are still Misleading Consumers: Tar Numbers on Cigarette Packs in South Korea

Michael Iacobelli, MPH; Kevin Welding, PhD; Katherine Clegg Smith, PhD; Joanna Cohen, PhD

Background

- “Low” and “ultra-low” tar cigarette sales are projected to increase in South Korea
- South Korea bans the use of misleading descriptors, but requires the quantitative reporting of cigarette constituents, such as tar, contrary to FCTC Article 11
- The presence of these figures could lead consumers to believe that some cigarettes are safer than others

Objective: To examine the prevalence of misleading numbers on cigarette packs in South Korea

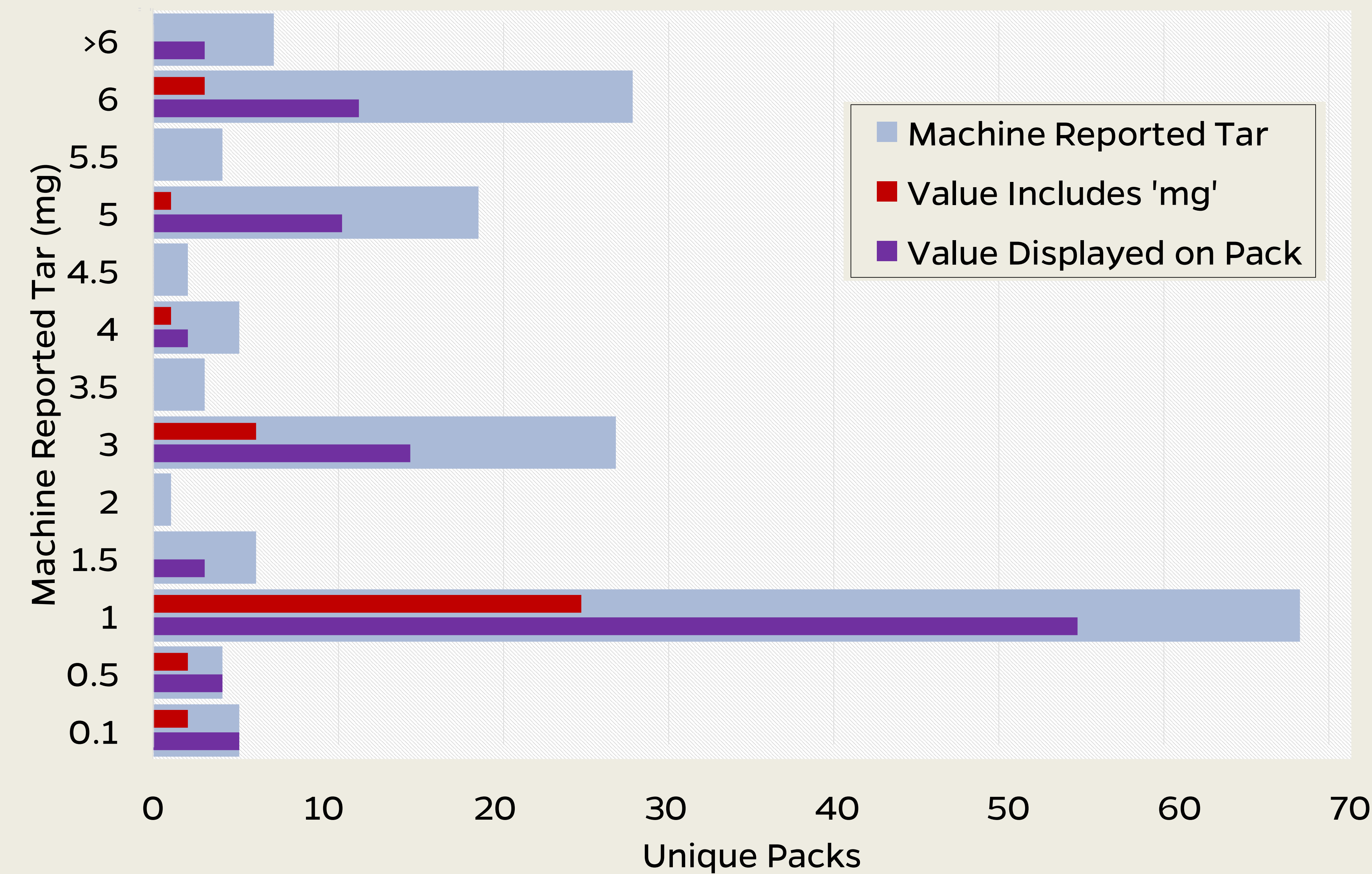
Methods

- In August 2018, unique cigarette packs were collected from nine neighborhoods (4 middle- and 5 high-income) in Seoul, and 4 neighborhoods (1 middle- and 3 high-income) in Busan
- Neighborhoods were selected based on where affluent, young adults resided and frequented, including but not limited to university campuses and nightlife districts
- 178 unique cigarette packs with the current HWL were purchased using a systematic protocol and double-coded

Acknowledgements. JC holds the Bloomberg Professorship of Disease Prevention at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health; the earnings from that endowment helped to support this work. Karolyne Kim contributed to primary collection of cigarette packages.

Results

Machine reported tar values and the presence of additional tar values on the pack



- 178 packs (100%) displayed a machine reported a tar value
- KT&G (n=36) products represented 54% of all 1mg packs
- 109 packs (61%) had an additional tar value displayed
- 96% of JTI (n=23/24) products; 69% of BAT (n=22/32) products; 59% of PMI (n=20/34) products; and 50% of KT&G (n=44/88) products displayed an additional tar value on the cigarette package

Location of tar values and 'mg' on cigarette packs in South Korea



Series of Mevius packs. Increasing 'strength' is denoted by a darker color and an additional value on the front of the pack.



Conclusions

- Tobacco companies overwhelmingly display a 1 or 1mg on cigarette packages compared to other machine reported tar levels
- This branding might imply to consumers that one brand is less harmful than another
- Policymakers must take into account these cigarette packaging design elements in order to protect the public from potentially misleading claims