Tobacco outlet density and social disadvantage in New South Wales, Australia

There is evidence to suggest a possible association between ease of access to tobacco and uptake of smoking, and the likelihood of cessation. A recent analysis of tobacco outlet density (TOD) in the USA found that TOD was higher in areas where a higher proportion of Hispanics and African-Americans live, and in areas where a higher proportion of families live in poverty. The authors concluded that higher TOD may contribute to disparities in smoking prevalence. This sort of evidence has led to proposals that control of TOD be considered in tobacco control efforts.

In the Australian state of New South Wales (NSW), a requirement to notify the state government of intention to sell tobacco products became mandatory under the Public Health (Tobacco) Act 2008. The notification data was then acquired by the Cancer Council NSW under a Government Information (Public Access) request in 2011. Using these data, we aimed to examine possible associations between TOD and socioeconomic status and remoteness across NSW.

Of the 12,451 current tobacco retailers registered, 811 were excluded because addresses were incorrectly entered, or were unable to be matched to a local government area (LGA). The outcome of interest was TOD, defined as the number of tobacco retailers per 100,000 people. Socioeconomic disadvantage was measured for each LGA (n=138) using Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA). SEIFA is calculated by the Australian Bureau of Statistics using census data, including level of education, employment status and household income. LGAs vary significantly in size (from less than 10 km² to more than 50,000 km²) and population (from less than 20,000 to more than 300,000), so a measure of geographical remoteness was included using the Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA). This study suggests that greater attention needs to be devoted to monitoring TOD, so that tobacco control efforts can be appropriately targeted.

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What this paper adds

- Our findings indicate that there is an association between tobacco outlet density and social disadvantage and remoteness, after controlling for smoking prevalence, in New South Wales, Australia.
- This suggests that outlet density may reflect a deliberate strategy by the tobacco industry, and that further research should be conducted to explore the effects of outlet density on smoking behaviours.
REFERENCES


