

Limiting Cigarette Variety Curbs Smoking

Abstract

This paper demonstrates that limiting cigarette variety leads to sustained reductions in smoking. We leverage a natural experiment created by the sudden discontinuation of 23 cigarette products following the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake. Using difference-in-differences estimation with nationally representative home scanner data, we find that smokers of discontinued products reduced their monthly purchases by 32 percent. Combined with a shift toward lower-tar and lower-nicotine cigarettes, total tar and nicotine consumption fell by 43 and 30 percent, respectively. These effects persist for at least three years and are robust across demographic subgroups. The findings suggest that restricting product variety could reduce the population-level harms from addictive goods without requiring outright bans.

Keyword: Product variety; tobacco control; natural experiment; Japan