

LETTER to the EDITOR

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Clarifications on Tobacco Advertising and Youth Smoking Study

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Dear Editor

I read with interest the article “Tobacco Advertisements Near Schools and Its Association with Smoking Behaviour Students in North Sumatera Province, Indonesia” by Rochadi et al [1]. The study addresses an important public health concern, however several inconsistencies in the data, methods, and citations merit clarification.

First, the sample size is reported as 3,820 in the abstract and methods, but 3,821 in the results. Even a small difference matters, as reported sample size is expected to remain consistent. Second, the number of schools included is not consistent, 160 schools are mentioned in the abstract, while 150 are noted in the methods. Finally, smoking prevalence is presented in two different ways: 11.4% of students (437) are reported as smokers in the abstract, while 5.6% (213) are listed as smokers in the results (Table 1). This difference needs clarification.

As far as methods section is concerned, the study is described as an “observational explanatory design,” yet it is cross-sectional and can only show associations-not causality. Phrasing that suggests otherwise may mislead readers. In addition, the sampling approach is unclear; while the number of respondents and schools is stated, it is not explained whether they were chosen randomly, stratified, or by convenience, which makes it hard to judge representativeness. Further, the definition of smoking behaviour is not consistent, as the methods mention smoking in the past 14 days while other sections seem to reflect different measures such as ever-use or past-30-day use. Clearer descriptions of design, sampling, and outcome measurement would improve the transparency and strength of this important study. The methods section is somewhat confusing, as it first states that “the study will be conducted in junior high schools, senior high schools, and universities in Medan City” but then adds that “the research was conducted from August 2023 to November 2023.”, which is grammatically inaccurate. The mention of universities seems misplaced since the population, title, and results focus only on junior and senior high school students.

The article cites WHO, 2015 as reference 5 [2], to suggest that 45% of 96.8 million Indonesians will smoke by 2025, but this figure does not appear in the cited report and appears to be inaccurate. The WHO global report on trends in prevalence of tobacco use 2000–2025 (2021, Fourth edition) predicted current tobacco use as 38.6% among the Indonesian population [3]. Similarly, Reference 13 [4], which focuses on students’ perceptions of cigarette

advertising, is used to support claims about increases in smoking behavior and the impact of advertising bans. However, since this study does not measure prevalence or behavioral change, its use in that context is a mis-citation. Clearer alignment between claims and supporting sources would improve the accuracy and strength of the paper.

Overall, the study addresses an urgent and relevant issue, but correcting the inconsistencies in data reporting, clarifying the methods, and aligning claims with appropriate sources would strengthen the credibility and impact of this valuable work.

References

1. Rochadi RK, Siregar PA, Suraya R, Apriliani A, Arrazy S, Siregar PY, et al. Tobacco advertisements near schools and its association with smoking behaviour students in north sumatera province, indonesia. *Asian Pac J Cancer Prev*. 2025;26(9):3415-22. <https://doi.org/10.31557/apjcp.2025.26.9.3415>.
2. WHO. Report on the global tobacco epidemic: Raising taxes on tobacco; 2015.
3. WHO. WHO global report on trends in prevalence of tobacco use 2000-2025 (4th edition); 2021.
4. Prabandari YS, Dewi A. How do Indonesian youth perceive cigarette advertising? A cross-sectional study among Indonesian high school students. *Glob Health Action*. 2016;9:30914. <https://doi.org/10.3402/gha.v9.30914>.

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Reply to the letter to the editor: Clarifications on Tobacco Advertising and Youth Smoking Study

Dear Editor

We thank the Editor for the opportunity to respond to the letter from Patel and Jena regarding our manuscript

titled “Tobacco Advertisements Near Schools and Its Association with Smoking Behaviour Students in North Sumatera Province, Indonesia.” We also extend our appreciation to Patel and Jena for their thorough reading and constructive feedback. Below, we address each of the points raised in their letter.

Sample Size Inconsistency

We acknowledge the typographical error in the reported sample size. The correct sample size is 3,821 respondents, as stated in the results section. The number 3,820 in the abstract was an error and will be corrected.

Number of Schools

The correct number of schools included in the study is 160, as mentioned in the abstract. The reference to 150 schools in the methods section was a mistake and will be revised accordingly.

Smoking Prevalence

The discrepancy in smoking prevalence arises from the use of two different measures of smoking behavior. Specifically:

- * Ever smokers: 437 students (11.4%) (please delete in abstract)

- * Smoking in the past 14 days: 213 students (5.6%)

- * We apologize for the lack of clarity and will revise the manuscript to explicitly distinguish between these two measures.

Study Design

We agree that the term “observational explanatory design” may have been misleading. This study employs an observational approach with a cross-sectional design and aims to describe associations, not causality. The title and conclusions of the article clearly reflect this associative scope.

Sampling Method

The sampling process was conducted as follows:

- * The study population consisted of 221 schools in Medan City.

- * A total of 160 schools were selected based on their willingness to participate and provide research permits.

- * From each school, 23–24 students were selected with approval from their homeroom teachers, considering ethical considerations related to student participation.

Definition of Smoking Behavior

As noted in point 3, two questions were used to assess smoking behavior:

- * Whether students had ever smoked

- * Whether students had smoked in the past 14 days

- * This explains the two different prevalence rates reported. We will ensure consistency in the use of these definitions throughout the manuscript.

Study Population and Site Description

References to universities in the methods section were included because several school complexes in Medan

City are integrated with university campuses in the same building complex, which must be explained because the authors measured cigarette advertising points and school or university buildings located in the same area. However, the study itself focused solely on junior and senior high school students. Please delete university will be clear.

Citation of WHO Report

We apologise for the error in the data entry from the WHO Report on the Global Tobacco Epidemic: Raising Taxes on Tobacco (2015), specifically in table 1.3 on page 122 and Table 4.1 on page 186 (Revised: The World Health Organization indicates that the prevalence of daily smoking among adults in Indonesia is 33%, based on a population of 96 million [5]).

Use of Reference 13 (Prabandari & Dewi, 2016)

Conclusions in abstract presented by Prabandari Y, Dewi A (ref 4): This study revealed that cigarette ads were perceived as encouraging youths to smoke and that smoking status was consistently associated with perception of cigarette ads targeted at youths, attitude toward TAPS, and susceptibility as well as smoking friends and family. Regulations to ban TAPS, particularly cigarette ads for preventing youths from smoking, should be adopted rapidly in Indonesia, where tobacco control remains limited)

We referenced Prabandari and Dewi (2016) to support the argument that cigarette advertising influences adolescents’ perceptions and smoking behavior, and to argue for the need for stronger advertising regulations.

Conclusion

We sincerely thank Patel and Jena for their valuable input, which has helped us identify areas for improvement. We are committed to revising this manuscript to improve its clarity, accuracy, and overall quality. We will work with the editorial office to implement these improvements as soon as possible.

R. Kintoko Rochadi