

PEER REVIEW HISTORY

BMJ Open publishes all reviews undertaken for accepted manuscripts. Reviewers are asked to complete a checklist review form ([see an example](#)) and are provided with free text boxes to elaborate on their assessment. These free text comments are reproduced below. Some articles will have been accepted based in part or entirely on reviews undertaken for other BMJ Group journals. These will be reproduced where possible.

ARTICLE DETAILS

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| TITLE (PROVISIONAL) | Flemish adolescents' perceptions of cigarette plain packaging:: a qualitative study with focus group discussions |
| AUTHORS | Van Hal, Guido; Van Roosbroeck, Sofie; Vriesacker, Bart; Arts, Matheus; Hoeck, Sarah; Fraeyman, Jessica |

VERSION 1 - REVIEW

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| REVIEWER | H.Boudrez Hartcentrum Anti-rookconsultaties UZGent I declare no conflict of interests |
| REVIEW RETURNED | 07-Jun-2012 |

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| REPORTING & ETHICS | A statement about ethical approval is lacking |
| GENERAL COMMENTS | Nice and very interesting paper. A few minor revisions may be helpful 1, Introduction section: the percentages of smokers between 15 and 24 years equal 99,9% instead of 100%; the difference between 28,6% and 5,2% (=23,4%) is called 'bigger' than the difference between 34,2% and 63,8% (= 29,6%) 2, P.9: 'the short questionnaire' which questionnaire is meant? about what topics? 3, I wonder if the tables 2 and 3 can be synthesized in the paper? 4, Are there any quantitative data on the proportion of participants subscribing each motive in order to rate the relative importance of each motive? 5, Discussion section: 'we did not find differences in attitudes and opinions.....training'. Where can we find the data on which this statement is based? 6, Did the study reveal data on other relevant aspects, f.e. differences between male and female participants? older and younger participants?..... |

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| REVIEWER | karine Gallopel-Morvan researcher in social marketing school of public health (Rennes, France) CREM (UMR CNRS) I have no conflicts of interests |
| REVIEW RETURNED | 12-Jun-2012 |

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| THE STUDY | - P.5, line 37: did you analyze non-verbal behaviors? - p.6, lines 9 & 10: it is not totally true because saturation depends on the topic. |
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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There are too many general discussions on the focus groups (P.5 & 6); it could be more relevant to describe your focus groups. - Why did you mix girls and boys in the focus groups? - The table 1 is interesting but the second column should detail results and comments of people (and not rationale/comments that are quite obvious). - Tables 2 & 3 could be reduced (ex: FG1: 2 males, 5 females, etc...) - There are strong differences in the size of the focus groups (3 vs 11 vs 4, etc.). Could you explain why? It could have an effect on results. - How did you analyse speeches? it is not enough detailed. - Regarding your sample: how many cigarettes do they smoke? - p.7, line 52: which popular brands? - Why did you choose a white tobacco plain packaging (why not brown)? - Did you insert cigarettes in the tested packs? - p.10, lines 21 to 26: why did you make these choices? |
| RESULTS & CONCLUSIONS | <p>This article deals with an important topic on tobacco control (plain packaging). Nevertheless, this kind of studies had been already implemented, sometimes on representative samples, and the conclusions of previous studies were the same (Beede, Golberg, Rootman, Hoek, Moodie, etc.). Except the fact that this survey was conducted on adolescents in Flanders the research question, the methodology used and the conclusions had been explored before.</p> <p>In the introduction, it could be relevant to make a sum up of previous research on tobacco plain packaging & adolescents and to underline what this paper adds to previous research.</p> <p>The results are described very briefly. We would have liked to get more details.</p> |

VERSION 1 – AUTHOR RESPONSE

Reviewer 1:

1. Introduction section: the percentages of smokers between 15 and 24 years equal 99,9% instead of 100%; the difference between 28,6% and 5,2% (=23,4%) is called 'bigger' than the difference between 34,2% and 63,8% (= 29,6%).

Authors' reply:

- Due to rounding off, the total percentage of the smoking behaviour between 15 and 24 years equaled 99.9. We now rounded up the highest percentage to end up with 100.00%.
- We agree with the reviewer, there might be some confusion concerning the differences between adolescents attending regular high school education and adolescents attending vocational training according to have been ever smokers and being daily smokers. What we meant is that there is a relative bigger difference regarding daily smokers compared to ever smokers. We therefore changed the phrasing in the manuscript as follows: 'There are half as many adolescents attending regular high school education that have ever smoked (34.2%) compared to adolescents attending vocational training (63.8%). The relative difference is even bigger when we look at the percentage of daily smokers in adolescents attending regular high school education (5.2%) compared to adolescents attending vocational training (28.6% daily smokers).'

2. P.9: 'the short questionnaire' which questionnaire is meant? about what topics?

Authors' reply:

- The short questionnaire mentioned on page 9, is earlier referred to on page 7: 'The script consists of a short questionnaire about some characteristics of the participants to get a better idea of their profile

(sex, date of birth, age at which first cigarette was smoked, age at which regular smoking started, mean number of cigarettes and mean number of smoking days a week),...' On page 9, we now mention that more information can be found on the short questionnaire elsewhere in the manuscript: 'The participants were assigned to the daily smokers group or the non-daily smokers group according to the information on the short questionnaire (mentioned above).'

3. I wonder if the tables 2 and 3 can be synthesized in the paper?

Authors' reply:

- We synthesized both tables.

4. Are there any quantitative data on the proportion of participants subscribing each motive in order to rate the relative importance of each motive?

Authors' reply:

- In qualitative research, it is not common to present the number of respondents subscribing a certain motive. This is also very difficult to do. For instance, when a respondent gives his opinion and all others are nodding in agreement, it would not be fair to quantify this as the opinion of just one respondent. This is the main reason why besides of a moderator, there was also an observer present at each FGD (see also the first remark of reviewer 2). The observer has taken into account the non-verbal behaviours and these were discussed afterwards with the moderator to come to a more general view of the relative importance of the different motives. Moreover, it is not the aim of qualitative research to focus on the (small) quantitative numbers, since these are too often considered as 'absolute': what is, for instance the difference between 5 respondents explicitly subscribing motive A and 'only' 4 respondents explicitly subscribing motive B? In the revised version of the manuscript, however, we added some diverging opinions in the result section where the number of respondents was given.

5. Discussion section: 'we did not find differences in attitudes and opinions.....training'. Where can we find the data on which this statement is based?

Authors' reply:

- In the limited number of pages a manuscript can contain, we tried to give the most interesting results. Since we could not find any marked differences in attitudes and opinions concerning plain packaging between adolescents attending regular high school education and those attending vocational training, it did not seem worthwhile to spend extra space on this aspect. The more since citations occupy a lot of space, also when it is just to underpin that no difference could be found.

6. Did the study reveal data on other relevant aspects, f.e. differences between male and female participants? older and younger participants?.....

Authors' reply:

- Before executing the focus group discussions, we mainly expected to see differences in opinions and attitudes concerning plain packaging between 15-16 year olds and 17-19 year olds and between adolescents attending regular high school education and those attending vocational training. Surprisingly, no marked differences were observed between these different categories. On the other hand, we did find marked differences between daily and non-daily smokers, which seemed to be the main line of fracture regarding the topic under study.

Reviewer 2:

1. P.5, line 37: did you analyze non-verbal behaviors?

Authors' reply:

- As mentioned in the authors' reply to the fourth remark of reviewer 1, we did analyze non-verbal behaviour. Besides of a moderator, there was also an observer present at each FGD. We included

the following sentence in the manuscript: 'The observer has also taken into account the non-verbal behaviours and these were discussed afterwards with the moderator to come to a more general view of the relative importance of the different motives.'

2. p.6, lines 9 & 10: it is not totally true because saturation depends on the topic.

Authors' reply:

- We agree with the reviewer. Taking into account the next remark of the reviewer, we removed this part completely.

3. There are too many general discussions on the focus groups (P.5 & 6); it could be more relevant to describe your focus groups.

Authors' reply:

- We agree with the reviewer. The more general discussions on the focus groups are removed, so that the description of our own focus groups gets more attention.

4. Why did you mix girls and boys in the focus groups?

Authors' reply:

- We mainly expected differences between type of education and age groups, more than between boys and girls.

It is important that focus groups are as homogeneous as possible regarding the characteristics which are thought to be of influence on the results of the study. On the other hand it is theoretically and practically not possible to keep all characteristics homogenous in all groups. We know that in Flanders, there are big differences in smoking behaviour between pupils attending regular high school education and those attending vocational training. We also know that the social world of 15-to-16-year olds and 17-to-18-year olds might differ in many aspects. That's why we had separate focus groups regarding type of education and age. The results showed that there were indeed no differences between the opinions and attitudes regarding plain packaging between boys and girls. On the other hand, we found that there were big differences between pupils who were regular smokers and those who were no regular smokers. It might therefore be interesting to have homogeneous focus groups for this characteristic in future research.

5. The table 1 is interesting but the second column should detail results and comments of people (and not rationale/comments that are quite obvious).

Authors' reply:

- We agree with the reviewer that table 1 can be made more informative. For that reason we deleted obvious comments and added results where appropriate. Where it is helpful to understand the flow of the focus group discussions, the rationale was kept.

6. Tables 2 & 3 could be reduced (ex: FG1: 2 males, 5 females, etc...)

Authors' reply:

- Indeed, it seemed possible to integrate both tables in one, comprehensive table. This was also a remark of reviewer 1.

7. There are strong differences in the size of the focus groups (3 vs 11 vs 4, etc.). Could you explain why? It could have an effect on results.

Authors' reply:

- We agree with the reviewer: there are strong differences in the size of the focus groups. Originally, it was the intention to have between six and ten participants in each focus group. However, previous studies we did, showed that the recruitment of appropriate respondents is not always easy. For that reason, we chose to have the recruitment done by a company specialized in market research. However, even for them, it seemed not to be that easy to recruit enough participants with the right characteristics at the fixed moments. In the end, there were some focus groups that were somewhat bigger and some that were somewhat smaller than originally intended. After extensive discussions between the moderator, the observers and other experienced researchers, we came to the conclusion that the results of all focus groups pointed in the same direction, and that all focus groups could be included in the study. Together with the fact that we have reached saturation of the data, we are convinced that the difference in size of the focus groups did not have a substantial effect on the results.

8. How did you analyse speeches? it is not enough detailed.

Authors' reply:

- We included more detail in the text concerning the analyses of the focus groups. 'After each focus group, there was a debriefing with the moderator and the observer. The notes of the observer were discussed, regarding the verbal and the non-verbal communication. The main points of interest that were raised during the focus group were registered in debriefing notes. The audio recordings of the focus groups were transcribed and the transcriptions were analyzed by means of Nvivo 9, a specialized software program. The qualitative data are analyzed following the method of open coding. This means that certain passages of the transcription are linked as open codes to certain axial codes. These axial codes are objective reproductions of the answers and regroup the open codes in a frame of codes. This frame of codes was obtained through an iterative process of constant comparison and reflection, giving insight in and explaining the perceptions of Flemish adolescents regarding cigarette plain packaging. This process was performed multiple times comparing different focus groups and the responses of different participants within focus groups, until central themes emerged. To guarantee validation of the analysis, the process was undertaken by a second independent analyst. The results of this coding procedure, were then compared with the debriefing notes of the focus groups and, if necessary, refined. Results of the analysis were presented along with relevant quotes from the transcript by way of illustration. For this purpose, a free translation of the quotes from Dutch to English was given, since the original language of communication was Dutch.'

9. Regarding your sample: how many cigarettes do they smoke?

Authors' reply:

- In the short questionnaire, we asked the mean number of cigarettes smoked a week and the mean number of smoking days a week. However, the information provided by the respondents is very diverse in character. For instance: 'I smoke only on parties', 'I smoke six cigarettes a day but somewhat more in the weekend', 'I smoke between two and three packages a week'. For that reason, we have chosen to only use two clear cut categories: daily smokers and non-daily smokers. Using this dichotomy seemed to be a good idea, since we could show big differences regarding the attitude on plain packages between both categories. In our discussion, we suggest to take into account the participant's nicotine dependence by for instance using the Fagerström test in future research as an alternative for the categories of daily and non-daily smokers we have used in our study.

10. p.7, line 52: which popular brands?

Authors' reply:

- The brands used in our study, were: L&M, Marlboro, Tigra, Camel and Pall Mall. This information is now added in the manuscript.

11. Why did you choose a white tobacco plain packaging (why not brown)?

Authors' reply:

- There is evidence that plain packages are seen as less attractive in adolescents and therefore can have a positive influence on the smoking behaviour. As well for white packages as for brown packages (Moodie, Mackintosh, Hastings Ford, 2011), this influence has been shown. Due to the cost for developing only a few pieces of plain packages of satisfactory quality, we opted for using only one colour (white). This choice was arbitrary.

12. Did you insert cigarettes in the tested packs?

Authors' reply:

- No, we did not insert cigarettes in the plain package.

13. p.10, lines 21 to 26: why did you make these choices?

Authors' reply:

- We did not mention the content of CO, nicotine and tar on the plain package as this could bring a misleading message to the respondents. The number of cigarettes was mentioned on the tax stamp and not on the package, because we had chosen to display as little information on the plain package as possible. The rationale behind it was to mention only the obligatory information on the packages and rule out all possibly misleading information.

14. In the introduction, it could be relevant to make a sum up of previous research on tobacco plain packaging & adolescents and to underline what this paper adds to previous research

Authors' reply:

- In the introduction, a sum up of previous research on tobacco plain packaging & adolescents is given, together with a rationale why it is important to perform a similar study in Flemish adolescents. The following paragraph was added: 'Several studies in different countries, such as the UK, Germany, France, New Zealand, Australia and the USA, found that adolescents perceive plain packages as less attractive (Germain et al., 2010; Hammond et al., 2009; Moodie et al., 2011; Doxey et al., 2011; Brown et al., 2012). Together with the health warnings being much more eye-catching on plain packages, this is very likely to promote cessation among adolescents (Hoek et al., 2011), especially in non-daily smokers (Munafò et al., 2011). Based on qualitative research, Gendall et al. conclude that the ease with which packaging alone enabled young people to identify brand attributes, shows that tobacco packaging functions as advertising. Although, a lot of evidence in different continents is available concerning the potential of plain packages to influence the smoking behaviour in adolescents, cultural and local factors might still play a role. In Flanders, no study on plain packaging had been done before. For that reason, a qualitative study on plain packaging in Flemish adolescents was performed to rule out erratic results compared to the existing evidence.'

Following references were added in the reference list:

Germain D, Wakefield MA, Durkin SJ. Adolescents' perceptions of cigarette brand image: does plain packaging make a difference? *J Adolescent Health* 2010;46(4):385-92.

Hoek J, Wong C, Gendall P, Louviere J, Cong K. Effects of dissuasive packaging on young adults smokers. *Tob Control* 2011;20(3):183-8.

Hammond D, Dockrell M, Arnott D, Lee A, McNeill A. Cigarette pack design and perceptions of risk among UK adults and youth. *Eur J Public Health* 2009;19(6):631-7.

Munafò M, Roberts N, Bauld L, Leonards U. Plain packaging increases visual attention to health warnings on cigarette packs in non-smokers and weekly smokers but not daily smokers. *Addiction* 2011;106(8):1505-10.

Moodie C, Mackintosh A, Hastings G, Ford A. Young adult smokers' perceptions of plain packaging: a pilot naturalistic study. *Tob Control* 2011;20(5):367-73.

Doxey J, Hammond D. Deadly in pink: the impact of cigarette packaging among young women. *Tob Control* 2011;20(5):353-60.

Brown A, McNeill A, Mons U, Guignard R. Do smokers in Europe think all cigarettes are equally harmful? *Eur J Public Health* 2012;22 Suppl 1:35-40.

Gendall P, Hoek J, Thomson G et al. Young adults' interpretations of tobacco brands: implications for tobacco control. *Nicotine Tob Res* 2011;13(10):911-8.

15. The results are described very briefly. We would have liked to get more details.

Authors' reply:

- Several sentences with more details and differentiations are added to the results section.

VERSION 2 – REVIEW

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| REVIEWER | Boudrez H. Heart Centre - Stop smoking clinic UZGent I declare no conflict of interests |
| REVIEW RETURNED | 30-Aug-2012 |

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| REPORTING & ETHICS | A statement about ethical approval or informed consent is still lacking. |
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| REVIEWER | KARINE GALLOPEL MORVAN EHESP (FRANCE) i HAVE NO CONFLICTS OF INTEREST |
| REVIEW RETURNED | 28-Aug-2012 |

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| GENERAL COMMENTS | <ul style="list-style-type: none">- P.3 : the objective of the article is not to measure the impact of plain packaging on smoking behavior: the authors tested only perceptions and behavioural intentions (and not behaviour).- P.4: what is the law regarding tobacco control and the warnings (size, visual or not) in Flanders ?- There is a mistake on p.5 concerning the reference 13: this research tested attention on warnings but not cessation.- P.5: the justification of this study is the possible cultural differences between Flanders and other countries where research on plain packaging was conducted. What kind of cultural differences ? A look on these report could be useful to answer this question: " Survey on tobacco. Analytical report.", Flash Eurobarometer, 253, The Gallup organization, March 2009. "Tobacco", Eurobarometer, 332, TNS opinion and social, May 2010.- I am not a native English but I think that the English of this article is not perfect. It should be read by a native English.- In order to clarify the presentation of the paper, the results should not be presented in the "material and methods" part (table 1, "main results").- P.6: what kind of analysis was conducted on non-verbal behaviours? (did you really analyze non-verbal behaviours or only speeches?). It is unclear.- NVivo allows presenting the results in a map. It could be interesting to present some of the maps (for instance, differences of answers between smokers and non smokers).- A picture of the tested tobacco packs should be showed in an appendix.- Table 1 is too long (description of all the questions = it is not necessary). The last column ("main results") should be presented in the next part.- The description of the method & material is too long. For example, it is not necessary to insert the last lines on page 11 because there is a picture of the tested plain pack in the appendix. Table 2 could be inserted as an appendix. |
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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How many cigarettes the participants smoke? - P.11: what do you mean by “special attention was paid to the legal protection of the producers of brand packages”? - P.17: repetition of “in 2009,... olds”. It was already said before. - Boxes 1, 2, etc.: It is hard to read all the citations you quote. A possible way of presenting results could be: “ Main results on topic XXX + an example of 1 citation that represents this topic XXX. It could be clearer to mention the respondents’ profile like that: female daily smoker, 20 (instead of FGD2, P2, ds...). More development should be proposed to present the results (results must not be presented only through quotations). - P.23: I do not understand this sentence: “these findings suggest a positive impact on smoking behaviour of health warnings on plain packages”? - P.24: what is the link between the fact that “there was saturation of the data” and the validity of your research ? This point is really unclear. - You did not answer the following questions (last review): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Why did you mix girls and boys in the focus groups? o There are strong differences in the size of the focus groups (3 vs 11 vs 4, etc.). Could you explain why? It could have an effect on results. o Why did you choose a white tobacco plain packaging (why not brown)? o Did you insert cigarettes in the tested packs |
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VERSION 2 – AUTHOR RESPONSE

Reviewer 1: - P.3 : the objective of the article is not to measure the impact of plain packaging on smoking behavior: the authors tested only perceptions and behavioural intentions (and not behaviour).

Authors’ reply:

- We agree with the reviewer. We changed the sentence as follows in the manuscript: ‘What is the impact of the appearance of a plain cigarette package on the smoking perceptions and behavioural intentions of adolescents?’

- P.4: what is the law regarding tobacco control and the warnings (size, visual or not) in Flanders ?

Authors’ reply:

- All sold tobacco products in Belgium, have to mention a general health warning on the package. Besides of the general warning, also a combined warning has to be mentioned, i.e. a picture or another illustration together with a accompanying text. These health warnings have to cover 40 to 50% of the package, according to whether the message is mentioned in one, two or all three the official languages in Belgium. ♦ This text is included in the manuscript.

There is a mistake on p.5 concerning the reference 13: this research tested attention on warnings but not cessation.

Authors’ reply:

We agree with the reviewer. The reference 13 was put on the right place: ‘Together with the health warnings, which are much more eye-catching on plain packages, [13] this is more likely to promote cessation among adolescents, especially in non-daily smokers.[14]

- P.5: the justification of this study is the possible cultural differences between Flanders and other countries where research on plain packaging was conducted. What kind of cultural differences ? A look on these report could be useful to answer this question: " Survey on tobacco. Analytical report.", Flash Eurobarometer, 253, The Gallup organization, March 2009. "Tobacco", Eurobarometer, 332, TNS opinion and social, May 2010.

Authors' reply:

We thank the reviewer for bringing this up. In both reports, indeed, a lot of cultural differences concerning smoking attitudes and behaviour are presented. We added the following sentences in the manuscript: 'There are big differences in attitudes, opinions and behaviour concerning smoking throughout Europe. Some of many more possible examples show this. For instance: only 41% of Belgian people are totally in favour of smoking restrictions in bars, pubs and clubs, while in Italy, this is 87%. Moreover, only 14% of Belgians thinks that health warnings on tobacco packages are very effective, while this is 46% in Rumania. [16] Concerning smoking behaviour, 30% of Belgians were smokers in 2009, while this was only 16% in Swedish people. [17].'

- I am not a native English but I think that the English of this article is not perfect. It should be read by a native English.

Authors' reply:

The manuscript has now been read and revised by a native speaker of English. The changes were also inserted using 'track changes'.

- In order to clarify the presentation of the paper, the results should not be presented in the "material and methods" part (table 1, "main results").

Authors' reply:

The results mentioned in table 1 were removed and put in the 'material and methods' section.

- P.6: what kind of analysis was conducted on non-verbal behaviours? (did you really analyze non-verbal behaviours or only speeches?). It is unclear.

Authors' reply:

The most important non-verbal behaviour the observer noted was when the group was nodding. This is important, because when only one person is speaking and expresses a certain argument, this becomes much stronger and more important when all other respondents are nodding at the same moment. The observer could also fix the attention of the moderator on respondents who made clear

by means of their body language that they did not agree with the argument of another respondent. The moderator could then ask why he or she did not agree.

-NVivo allows presenting the results in a map. It could be interesting to present some of the maps (for instance, differences of answers between smokers and non smokers).

Authors' reply:

We are a little bit confused by the remark of the reviewer. All respondents were smokers, so differences of answers between smokers and non smokers can not be presented.

- A picture of the tested tobacco packs should be showed in an appendix.

Authors' reply:

We inserted a picture of the tested tobacco packs in an appendix.

- Table 1 is too long (description of all the questions = it is not necessary). The last column ("main results") should be presented in the next part.

Authors' reply:

We have switched the 'main results' to the 'results section' and shortened table 1.

- The description of the method & material is too long. For example, it is not necessary to insert the last lines on page 11 because there is a picture of the tested plain pack in the appendix. Table 2 could be inserted as an appendix.

Authors' reply:

We deleted the last lines on page 11 and the first ones on page 12 and table 2 was inserted as an appendix.

- How many cigarettes the participants smoke?

Authors' reply:

We answered this question already on the occasion of the previous review. The answer is repeated below:

- In the short questionnaire, we asked the mean number of cigarettes smoked a week and the mean number of smoking days a week. However, the information provided by the respondents is very diverse in character. For instance: 'I smoke only on parties', 'I smoke six cigarettes a day but somewhat more in the weekend', 'I smoke between two and three packages a week'. For that reason, we have chosen to only use two clear cut categories: daily smokers and non-daily smokers. Using this dichotomy seemed to be a good idea, since we could show big differences regarding the attitude on plain packages between both categories. In our discussion, we suggest to take into account the participant's nicotine dependence by for instance using the Fagerström test in future research as an alternative for the categories of daily and non-daily smokers we have used in our study.

- P.11: what do you mean by "special attention was paid to the legal protection of the producers of brand packages"?

Authors' reply:

Here, we in fact mean that the design of the brand package was checked meticulously to create a plain package that is as realistic as possible. We agree that the way this is phrased, is not ideal. We changed this as follows: 'The design of the original package was checked meticulously to create a plain package that is as realistic as possible'.

- P.17: repetition of "in 2009,... olds". It was already said before.

Authors' reply:

We deleted the sentence that was repeated.

- Boxes 1, 2, etc.: It is hard to read all the citations you quote. A possible way of presenting results could be: " Main results on topic XXX + an example of 1 citation that represents this topic XXX

Authors' reply:

We present now one quotation for every main result in box 1. In box 2, two quotations were deleted.

It could be clearer to mention the respondents' profile like that: female daily smoker, 20 (instead of FGD2, P2, ds...).

Authors' reply:

These changes were now made throughout the manuscript.

More development should be proposed to present the results (results must not be presented only

through quotations).

Authors' reply:

In the result section, several quotations were deleted. The remaining results, represent the most important findings of our study. We think it is important not to give too many results which are of lesser importance, in order not to distract the reader.

- P.23: I do not understand this sentence: "these findings suggest a positive impact on smoking behaviour of health warnings on plain packages"?

Authors' reply:

We understand that this sentence is indeed not very clear. We changed it as follows: 'These findings suggest a bigger impact on smoking behaviour of health warnings on plain packages compared to health warnings on original packages'.

- P.24: what is the link between the fact that "there was saturation of the data" and the validity of your research ? This point is really unclear.

Authors' reply:

We agree with the reviewer. The fact that there was saturation of the data, means that we can be rather confident that another focus group would not have added new data. However, this is something else than the validity of the study. We therefore deleted this part in the manuscript.

- You did not answer the following questions (last review):

- o Why did you mix girls and boys in the focus groups?
- o There are strong differences in the size of the focus groups (3 vs 11 vs 4, etc.). Could you explain why? It could have an effect on results.
- o Why did you choose a white tobacco plain packaging (why not brown)?
- o Did you insert cigarettes in the tested packs

Authors' reply:

This must be a misunderstanding. We answered all four questions on the occasion of the previous review. We repeat them below.

1. Why did you mix girls and boys in the focus groups?

Authors' reply:

- We mainly expected differences between type of education and age groups, more than between boys and girls.

It is important that focus groups are as homogeneous as possible regarding the characteristics which are thought to be of influence on the results of the study. On the other hand it is theoretically and practically not possible to keep all characteristics homogenous in all groups. We know that in Flanders, there are big differences in smoking behaviour between pupils attending regular high school education and those attending vocational training. We also know that the social world of 15-to-16-year olds and 17-to-18-year olds might differ in many aspects. That's why we had separate focus groups regarding type of education and age. The results showed that there were indeed no differences between the opinions and attitudes regarding plain packaging between boys and girls. On the other hand, we found that there were big differences between pupils who were regular smokers and those who were no regular smokers. It might therefore be interesting to have homogeneous focus groups for this characteristic in future research.

2. There are strong differences in the size of the focus groups (3 vs 11 vs 4, etc.). Could you explain why? It could have an effect on results.

Authors' reply:

- We agree with the reviewer: there are strong differences in the size of the focus groups. Originally, it was the intention to have between six and ten participants in each focus group. However, previous studies we did, showed that the recruitment of appropriate respondents is not always easy. For that reason, we chose to have the recruitment done by a company specialized in market research. However, even for them, it seemed not to be that easy to recruit enough participants with the right characteristics at the fixed moments. In the end, there were some focus groups that were somewhat bigger and some that were somewhat smaller than originally intended. After extensive discussions between the moderator, the observers and other experienced researchers, we came to the conclusion that the results of all focus groups pointed in the same direction, and that all focus groups could be included in the study. Together with the fact that we have reached saturation of the data, we are convinced that the difference in size of the focus groups did not have a substantial effect on the results.

3. Why did you choose a white tobacco plain packaging (why not brown)?

Authors' reply:

- There is evidence that plain packages are seen as less attractive in adolescents and therefore can have a positive influence on the smoking behaviour. As well for white packages as for brown packages (Moodie, Mackintosh, Hastings Ford, 2011), this influence has been shown. Due to the cost for developing only a few pieces of plain packages of satisfactory quality, we opted for using only one colour (white). This choice was arbitrary.

4. Did you insert cigarettes in the tested packs?

Authors' reply:

- No, we did not insert cigarettes in the plain package, nor in the original pack.

Reviewer 2: A statement about ethical approval or informed consent is still lacking.

Authors' reply:

We are sorry to not have answered this question previously but due to the lay-out of the e-mail message we received, it was not totally clear to us that this was a reviewer's question. The recruitment of the respondents was organized by a company specialized in market research. They have a database of possible respondents at their disposal and collected an informed consent for each of the participating respondents.

VERSION 3 - REVIEW

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| REVIEWER | Karine Gallopel-Morvan EHESP Av Professeur Leon Bernard I have no conflict of interests |
| REVIEW RETURNED | 04-Oct-2012 |

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| RESULTS & CONCLUSIONS | I have the same comments than on the last paper on results: - NVivo allows presenting the results in a map. It could be interesting to present some of the maps (for instance, differences of answers between smokers and non smokers). - Boxes 1 & 2 : it is not possible to present the results with very few text and 2 boxes with quotations; More development should be proposed to present the results (results must not be presented only through quotations). - The description of the method & material is too long compared to the results and the discussion. |
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VERSION 3 – AUTHOR RESPONSE

Reviewer:

I have the same comments than on the last paper on results:

- NVivo allows presenting the results in a map. It could be interesting to present some of the maps (for instance, differences of answers between smokers and non smokers).
- Boxes 1 & 2 : it is not possible to present the results with very few text and 2 boxes with quotations; More development should be proposed to present the results (results must not be presented only through quotations).
- The description of the method & material is too long compared to the results and the discussion.

Answers:

- The results section is more elaborated now. We have tried to give a more thorough insight into the

differences between daily and non-daily smokers and this is presented in the text, without changing the number of quotations. Since this section has changed a lot, we have chosen not to use track changes for the reading convenience of the reviewer.

- The Methods and Material section has been drastically shortened. We feel that the manuscript has become much better through these changes.

Correction

Van Hal G, Van Roosbroeck S, Vriesacker B, *et al.* Flemish adolescents' perceptions of cigarette plain packaging: a qualitative study with focus group discussions. *BMJ Open* 2012;**2**: e001424. There were errors in the citations to the boxes in this article. We have since corrected the online version.

BMJ Open 2013;**3**:e001424corr1. doi:10.1136/bmjopen-2012-001424corr1