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Article

# A systematic review and network meta-analysis of population-level interventions to tackle smoking behaviour

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This preregistered systematic review and meta-analysis (PROSPERO: CRD 42022311392) aimed to synthesize the effectiveness of all available population-level tobacco policies on smoking behaviour. Our search across 5 databases and leading organizational websites resulted in 9,925 records, with 476 studies meeting our inclusion criteria. In our narrative summary and both pairwise and network meta-analyses, we identified anti-smoking campaigns, health warnings and tax increases as the most effective tobacco policies for promoting smoking cessation. Flavour bans and free/discounted nicotine replacement therapy also showed statistically significant positive effects on guit rates. The network meta-analysis results further indicated that smoking bans, anti-tobacco campaigns and tax increases effectively reduced smoking prevalence. In addition, flavour bans significantly reduced e-cigarette consumption. Both the narrative summary and the meta-analyses revealed that smoking bans, tax increases and anti-tobacco campaigns were associated with reductions in tobacco consumption and sales. On the basis of the available evidence, anti-tobacco campaigns, smoking bans, health warnings and tax increases are probably the most effective policies for curbing smoking behaviour.

Tobacco use remains a persistent global health challenge. Despite numerous control policies implemented at both global and national levels over the years<sup>1</sup>, tobacco use continues to be a major cause of premature death. In 2019 alone, there were a staggering 8.7 million deaths worldwide directly attributable to tobacco consumption<sup>2</sup>. Tobacco exposure, through active or passive smoking, presents serious risks for non-communicable diseases, particularly cardiovascular diseases, cancers, chronic respiratory diseases and diabetes<sup>3</sup>, which account for nearly three-quarters of annual deaths globally<sup>1</sup>. Various control approaches have been proposed and implemented to deter the demand for smoking and improve health, including taxation, mass media campaigns, health warnings on packaging, marketing restrictions and smoke-free laws<sup>4-6</sup>. To date, evidence on behavioural outcomes such as smoking prevalence, initiation and cessation in response to tobacco control policies has been mixed<sup>4,7,8</sup>. In 2008, the World Health Organization, in line with the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, introduced the MPOWER policy package—a set of six measures designed to guide countries in rolling out cost-effective interventions aimed at reducing tobacco demand across populations<sup>9</sup>. As shown in previous studies<sup>10,11</sup>, countries that have implemented high levels of MPOWER measures, particularly those pertaining to "monitoring the use of tobacco products" and "raising taxes on tobacco products"<sup>10</sup>, have effectively reduced smoking prevalence among adults. However, in many countries implementing lower levels of MPOWER, it remains

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unclear whether and how different types of interventions, standalone or combined, can reduce smoking at scale.

Existing systematic reviews and meta-analyses focusing on population-level smoking behaviour have reported mixed results (Supplementary Table 1)<sup>3,4,8,12-26</sup>. A recent study by Bafunno et al. noted a reduction in smoking initiation after tax or price increases, an increase in guit attempts associated with mass media campaigns and a modest increase in cessation rates resulting from smoking bans<sup>8</sup>. An earlier systematic review revealed that in high-income countries (HICs), taxes, smoking bans, multicomponent programmes and cessation treatments are associated with reduced smoking prevalence<sup>25</sup>. Wilson et al.<sup>4</sup>. found that tobacco prices had a substantial impact on smoking prevalence, while smoking bans and mass media campaigns had a moderate impact on both smoking prevalence and initiation. There was limited evidence regarding the impact of other interventions, such as health warnings and advertising bans<sup>4</sup>. Other reviews have found varying effects of standalone tobacco control policies on behavioural outcomes. Five systematic reviews focusing on mass media campaigns<sup>3,12,17-19</sup> and three centred on smoking bans<sup>13-15</sup> reported inconsistent results. Chaloupka et al. found that tax or price increases had a positive impact on smoking cessation and reduced smoking initiation and intensity<sup>27</sup>.

Nevertheless, all the systematic reviews and meta-analyses mentioned above share certain characteristics: (1) a focus on recent primary studies at the time of their publication<sup>8</sup>; (2) a focus on specific population groups<sup>23,24</sup>; (3) a tendency to analyse single or selected interventions/policies, limiting the ability to directly compare different policy types<sup>3,12–15,24</sup>; and (4) a publication date before 2020, with several empirical studies having been published afterwards<sup>3,4,12–19,21,22,24</sup>. Finally, there is a lack of comprehensive systematic reviews assessing the impacts of alternative policies (for example, youth access laws or plain packaging mandates) on smoking behaviour. In this context, there is a clear need for a comprehensive evaluation of all available population-level primary prevention strategies for tobacco control to ascertain and compare their effects on smoking behaviour.

Our recently published systematic review and meta-analysis examined the associations between population-level tobacco control policies and health outcomes<sup>6</sup>. We found that only smoke-free legislation significantly reduces mortality and morbidity related to cardiovascular disease, chronic respiratory diseases and perinatal outcomes<sup>6</sup>. However, we did not explore the association between tobacco control interventions and behavioural outcomes, which are closely related to morbidity and mortality. This study delves deeper into smoking-related behaviours, which are more frequently represented in the existing literature and provide a richer dataset for analysis. It systematically reviews population-level policy interventions aimed at reducing smoking behaviour, covering all types of primary preventive interventions, including tax/price increases, campaigns, smoking bans, health warnings on cigarette packs and the free distribution of nicotine patches. This comprehensive analysis of real-world, population-level interventions allows us to synthesize the effects of individual policy types on behavioural outcomes and conduct a network meta-analysis to compare effectiveness and hierarchically establish policy priorities among the broad spectrum of population-level interventions. Such an approach is critical given the expected growth in the disease burden attributable to tobacco, especially in light of new public health threats such as COVID-19, which poses higher risks for infections and hospitalizations among smokers<sup>1,28,29</sup>.

#### Results

#### **Study characteristics**

Figure 1 presents the PRISMA flow chart detailing the study selection. The initial search identified 9,925 records. An additional 139 records were found in the reference lists of previous systematic reviews. After removing duplicates, we screened 8,587 articles for potential eligibility by title and abstract. Overall, 683 full-text articles were reviewed, of



Fig. 1 | Study selection. PRIMSA flow chart detailing the identification and screening of identified records for the systematic review and meta-analysis.

which 476 (refs. 10,11,30–503) studies were included in this systematic review. Of these 476 studies, 237 were included in the meta-analysis only, 211 were included in the narrative review only and 28 were included in both (Table 1).

The characteristics of the 476 included studies are summarized in the supplementary material (Supplementary Table 2). Most studies were conducted in HICs, particularly the USA (225), Australia (28), the UK (28), Canada (24), the Netherlands (8), Finland (6), New Zealand (5), South Korea (8) and Japan (8), while only a few were conducted in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), particularly in India (13) and China (12) (Supplementary Fig. 1). All included articles were published between 1981 and 2023. The most frequently reported outcomes were smoking prevalence (165 studies), quit rate (126), quit attempt (107), quit intention (54) and tobacco sales (27). The most commonly analysed policies were campaigns and advertisements (n = 138), tax/price increases (n = 139), smoking bans (n = 100), multicomponent policies (n = 27), health warnings (n = 55), flavour bans (n = 25) and youth access laws (n = 30). Other identified policies included free/discounted nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) (n = 7), education (n = 12), Quitline services (n = 7), media expenditure (n = 11), e-cigarette bans (n = 7), point-of-sale display bans (n = 12) and tobacco retail licensing (n = 3). Most studies were observational (n = 352), using cross-sectional (207), longitudinal (97), cohort (47) or case-control (1) designs. Fewer studies were quasi-experimental (n = 124), with designs such as controlled before and after (14), before and after (2), interrupted time series (66) or other quasi-experimental approaches (42). Finally, most studies were judged to be of high quality (305), with only a minority judged to be of moderate (101) or low (70) quality (Supplementary Table 2).

We found 14 (refs. 102–104,119,120,183,245,288,305,311,315, 344,420,498) studies covering different interventions/policies and outcomes that provided effect estimates in terms of relative risks (RRs) or hazard ratios (HRs) and offered sufficient information to convert these RRs/HRs into odds ratios (ORs). Among these studies, three<sup>103,288,498</sup> had an outcome prevalence of less than 10% (Supplementary Table 2).

Analysis	No. of studies	References
Meta-analysis	237	10,32-37,46,48,54,55,59-62,71,73,74,77,78,83,84,86-90,93,95,96,100-106,111-120,122,123,125-128,132,134,142,144,146,147,150-159,161, 165,168,169,171-176,182-185,187,189,193-195,198,206,208,213,216-218,220,222,224,226,228,231,235,236,240-242,245,247,250,252, 253,255,257-259,261,263,264,268,271,272,277,280,281,287-290,293,295,296,299,300,304-307,311-315,317-320,324,325, 329-335,337,339-341,345,346,348-350,358-360,362,368,373,376,382,385-387,395,396,398-403,406,408,409,412,416,417,419, 420,424,428,433-435,438-440,442,444-450,452,454,461,462,466,468,470,472,474,476,478,479,481,483,484,490,492,495, 497,498,502
Narrative review	211	10,30,31,38-40,42-45,47,49-51,53,56,57,63,65,67,70,72,75,76,79,80,85,91,92,97-99,107-110,124,129-131,133, 135-139,141,143,145,148,149,162-164,166,167,170,178-181,186,188,190-192,197,199,200,202,203,205,207,209,211,213,215, 219,221,225,227,229,230,232-234,238,239,243,245,246,249,251,254,260,262,266,269,270,273,275,278,282,283,285,286,291, 292,294,298,301-303,308-310,316,321-323,326-328,336,338,342,343,351-357,361,363-367,369-372,374,375,377-381,383,384, 388-394,397,404,405,410-412,414,415,418,421-423,425,429-432,436,437,441,451,456-460,463,465,469,471,473,475,477,479,482, 485-489,491,493,499,500,503
Both	28	11,41,52,58,81,82,94,121,211,223,248,256,265,267,279,284,297,344,407,427,443,453,455,464,467,494,496,501

#### Table 1 | References of the 476 total included studies in each analysis

#### **Main findings**

**Smoking behaviour.** Table 2 presents the results of the pairwise meta-analysis for outcomes related to smoking cessation. Supplementary Table 3 provides the effect size and 95% confidence interval (Cl) for each policy and outcome for which the pooled OR was calculated. To clarify the results, we included a study with only one outcome and policy. The odds of intending to quit smoking were greater after the implementation of health warnings (OR, 1.69; 95% Cl, 1.17–2.44; P < 0.01; 12 studies;  $\tau^2 = 0.14$ ) and campaigns (OR, 1.39; 95% Cl, 1.11–1.74; P < 0.01; 14 studies;  $\tau^2 = 0.09$ ) than for the control group. The odds of attempting to quit smoking increased significantly after the implementation of campaigns (OR, 1.16; 95% Cl, 1.08–1.24; P < 0.001; 33 studies;  $\tau^2 = 0.02$ ), health warnings (OR, 1.54; 95% Cl, 1.28–1.87; P < 0.001; 19 studies;  $\tau^2 = 0.37$ ), and a combination of health warnings and campaigns (OR, 1.57; 95% Cl, 1.35–1.83; P < 0.01; 2 studies;  $\tau^2 = 0.0$ ).

Importantly, the implementation of campaigns (OR, 1.17; 95% CI, 1.04–1.33; P = 0.01; 20 studies;  $\tau^2 = 0.04$ ), tax increases (OR, 1.18; 95% CI, 1.03–1.35; P = 0.02; 18 studies;  $\tau^2 = 0.05$ ), health warnings (OR, 1.86; 95% CI, 1.28–2.69; P < 0.01; 6 studies;  $\tau^2 = 0.02$ ), NRT (OR, 1.52; 95% CI, 1.29–1.79; P < 0.01; 3 studies;  $\tau^2 = 0.0\%$ ) and multicomponent laws (OR, 1.06; 95% CI, 1.00–1.12; P = 0.049; 2 studies;  $\tau^2 = 0.53$ ) were all significantly associated with increased odds of quitting smoking. However, no clear association was detected between the implementation of a smoking ban and changes in quit rates, quit attempts or quit intentions. When all three outcomes were pooled together, health warnings and campaigns (either in combination or alone), tax increases, flavour bans, multicomponent laws and NRT were all significantly associated with beneficial changes.

Figure 2 illustrates the results of the network meta-analysis for smoking-cessation-related outcomes, organized by outcome type and policy category. Health warnings (OR, 1.41; 95% CI, 1.23-1.60; p-score, 0.85 (the *p*-score value derived from network meta-analysis was used to rank interventions based on their effectiveness)) were identified as the most effective policy for increasing quitting intention, followed by tax increases (OR, 1.39; 95% CI, 1.17-1.67; p-score, 0.82) and campaigns (OR, 1.27; 95% CI, 1.12–1.43; *p*-score, 0.57). For quit attempts, the network meta-analysis results indicate that the most effective policies included health warnings, health warnings combined with campaigns, flavour bans, tax increases, multicomponent laws and campaigns alone. For quit rates, the results varied slightly across meta-analysis types. The network meta-analysis findings show that health warnings (OR, 1.79; 95% CI, 1.54-2.09; p-score, 0.92), flavour bans (OR, 1.80; 95% CI, 1.12-2.89; p-score, 0.87), NRT (OR, 1.53; 95% CI, 1.27-1.83; p-score, 0.76), multicomponent laws (OR, 1.22; 95% CI, 1.06-1.41; p-score, 0.52), tax increases (OR, 1.20; 95% CI, 1.13-1.28; p-score, 0.49) and campaigns (OR, 1.08; 95% CI, 1.03–1.12; p-score, 0.26) were all significantly associated with higher quit rates. Overall, the network meta-analysis results indicate beneficial changes in all types of quit-related outcomes when implementing flavour bans, NRT, health warnings combined with campaigns, health warnings alone, tax increases, multicomponent laws and campaigns alone.

Cigarette consumption. Table 3 presents the results of pairwise metaanalyses for smoking prevalence, e-cigarette consumption and secondhand smoke. Supplementary Table 4 provides the effect size and 95% CI for each policy and outcome for which the pooled OR was calculated. A significant reduction in smoking prevalence was observed for smoking bans (OR, 0.81; 95% CI, 0.71-0.91; P < 0.01; 24 studies;  $\tau^2 = 0.06$ ), campaigns alone (OR, 0.86; 95% CI, 0.80–0.92; P < 0.001; 16 studies;  $\tau^2 = 0.01$ ), tax increases (OR, 0.89; 95% CI, 0.80–0.99; P = 0.04; 11 studies;  $\tau^2 = 0.02$ ) and a combination of bans, tax increases and health warnings (OR, 0.84; 95% CI, 0.74–0.95; P = < 0.01; 2 studies;  $\tau^2 = 0.0$ ). A significant reduction in e-cigarette consumption was found for smoking bans (OR, 0.89; 95% CI, 0.82–0.96; P < 0.01; 2 studies;  $\tau^2 = 0.01$ ), e-cigarette bans (OR, 0.68; 95% CI, 0.48–0.97; P = 0.03; 1 study) and tobaccoretail licensing (OR, 0.90; 95% CI, 0.85-0.96; P < 0.001; 2 studies;  $\tau^2 = 0.18$ ). For second hand smoke, only one study on campaigns showed a significant reduction.

The network meta-analysis results (Fig. 3a,c) indicate that only smoking bans (OR, 0.81; 95% CI, 0.74–0.88; *p*-score, 0.86), campaigns (OR, 0.85; 95% CI, 0.76–0.95; *p*-score, 0.72) and tax increases (OR, 0.88; 95% CI, 0.78–0.99; *p*-score, 0.62) were effective in reducing smoking prevalence. In terms of reducing e-cigarette consumption, the network meta-analysis results (Fig. 3b,d) indicate that only flavour bans were effective (OR, 0.69; 95% CI, 0.49–0.98; *p*-score, 0.85).

Table 4 presents the results of pairwise meta-analyses for cigarette consumption, e-cigarette consumption, tobacco sales, e-cigarette sales, smoking prevalence and quit attempts/rates when effect estimates were presented as regression coefficients. Supplementary Table 5 provides the effect size and 95% CI for each policy and outcome for which the pooled coefficient was calculated. A significant negative association was found between tax increases and cigarette consumption (coefficient, -0.24; 95% CI, -0.38 to -0.09; P < 0.01; 27 studies;  $\tau^2 = 0.18$ ). For e-cigarette consumption, a significant negative association was found for flavour bans (coefficient, -1.21; 95% CI, -1.99 to -0.43; P < 0.001; 2 studies;  $\tau^2 = 0.53$ ). Finally, we observed an inverse association between smoking bans and tobacco sales (coefficient, -0.11; 95% CI, -0.15 to -0.08; P < 0.001; 3 studies;  $\tau^2 = 0.0$ ). No significant associations were found for the other types of policies and outcomes.

**Narrative summary.** A narrative summary of the effects of tobacco policies on smoking behaviour was derived from 239 papers that lacked sufficient quantitative data for inclusion in the meta-analysis.

# Table 2 | Pairwise meta-analysis of the effects of tobacco policies on outcomes related to smoking cessation, by outcome type and policy category

Policy	No. of studies <sup>a</sup>	Pooled OR (95% CI)	Р	Heterogeneity (95% CI)				
				l <sup>2</sup> (%)	τ²			
Quit intention								
Campaign	14	1.39 (1.11–1.74)	0.0069	77.9 (64.1–86.5)	0.09 (0.03–0.43)			
HW	12	1.69 (1.17–2.44)	0.0094	77.9 (58.3–86.4)	0.14 (0.08–1.75)			
Тах	4	1.45 (0.97–2.15)	0.0596	85.2 (63.4–94)	0.05 (0.01–0.88)			
Smoking ban	3	1.01 (0.97–1.05)	0.4396	0 (0–89.6)	0 (0–5.96)			
MMC-EXP	1	1.11 (0.99–1.26)	0.0094	NA	NA			
Quit attempt								
Campaign	33	1.16 (1.08–1.24)	0.0001	77.3 (68.7–83.5)	0.02 (0.01–0.07)			
HW	19	1.54 (1.28–1.87)	0.0001	89.3 (85–92.3)	0.10 (0.04–0.36)			
Тах	11	1.70 (1.14–2.55)	0.0139	96.5 (95.1–97.4)	0.37 (0.18–1.14)			
Smoking ban	9	1.03 (0.96–1.11)	0.3167	52.6 (6–76.1)	0.00 (0–1.17)			
HW+CAMP	2	1.57 (1.35–1.83)	0.0062	0 (0–89.6)	0 (0–0.01)			
Flavour ban	2	1.48 (0.86–2.55)	0.0687	0.0 (NA)	0 (NA)			
Law	2	1.18 (0.60–2.31)	0.1971	23 (NA)	0.00 (NA)			
Menthol flavour ban	1	1.44 (1.05–1.98)	0.0246	NA	NA			
MMC-EXP	1	0.91 (0.85–0.98)	0.0094	NA	NA			
Quit rate								
Campaign	20	1.17 (1.04–1.33)	0.0147	84.7 (78.2–89.2)	0.04 (0.03–0.30)			
Тах	18	1.18 (1.03–1.35)	0.0235	86.3 (79.8–90.7)	0.05 (0.02–0.15)			
Smoking ban	8	1.05 (0.84–1.31)	0.6183	69.7 (39.6–84.8)	0.03 (0.01–0.85)			
HW	6	1.86 (1.28–2.69)	0.0096	48.6 (0-81.2)	0.02 (0-1.29)			
Flavour ban	2	1.81 (0.12–27.89)	0.2224	0.0 (NA)	0 (NA)			
NRT	3	1.52 (1.29–1.79)	0.0000	0.0 (0–74.6)	0 (0–0.05)			
Law	2	1.06 (1.00–1.12)	0.0495	97.7 (NA)	0.53 (NA)			
MMC-EXP	1	0.44 (0.40-0.49)	0.0000	NA	NA			
PODB	1	1.01 (0.97–1.06)	0.6602	NA	NA			
E-cigarette ban	1	1.3 (0.94–1.82)	0.1181	NA	NA			
Menthol flavour ban	1	1.62 (1.08–2.43)	0.0191	NA	NA			
Youth access policy	1	0.57 (0.35–0.93)	0.0257	NA	NA			
Quitany								
Campaign	54	1.83 (1.18–1.26)	0.0000	79.9 (75.1–83.7)	0.03 (0.03–0.11)			
HW	30	1.56 (1.18–2.08)	0.0029	91.7 (89.6–93.4)	0.6 (0.41–1.13)			
Tax	28	1.47 (1.20–1.79)	0.0004	94.6 (93.3–95.6)	0.29 (0.18–0.55)			
Smoking ban	18	1.00 (0.99–1.01)	0.2235	55.7 (29.3–72.3)	0 (0.00–0.15)			
Flavour ban	3	1.53 (1.27–1.85)	0.0000	0.0 (0-84.7)	0 (0–0.46)			
Law	3	1.09 (1.04–1.15)	0.0002	93.9 (87.5–97)	0.20 (0.06–3.12)			
MMC-EXP	3	0.76 (0.23–2.256)	0.4370	98.8 (98–99.3)	0.23 (0.06–9.37)			
NRT	3	1.52 (1.29–1.79)	0.0000	0.0 (0-74.6)	0 (0–0.05)			
HW+CAMP	3	1.57 (1.02–2.41)	0.0416	0.0 (0-89.6)	0 (0-0.003)			
Menthol flavour ban	2	1.51 (1.17–1.93)	0.0013	0.0 (NA)	0 (NA)			
E-cigarette ban	1	1.30 (0.94–1.82)	0.1181	NA	NA			
PODB	1	1.01 (0.97–1.06)	0.6602	NA	NA			
Youth access policy	1	0.57 (0.35–0.93)	0.0257	NA	NA			

<sup>a</sup>Where two or more papers are included in the meta-analysis, the effect size (coefficient) is pooled; for single studies, the original effect size is presented. CAMP, campaigns; HW, health warnings; MMC-EXP, mass-media campaign expenditure; NA, not available; PODB, point-of-sale display ban.





A concise version of this summary is provided in Fig. 4, and more detailed information for each policy is compiled in the supplementary material (Supplementary Tables 6–12). We found that nearly all studies reported an increase in quit attempts following the implementation of multicomponent tobacco control programmes (6/6 studies), smoking bans (5/7), campaigns (9/9) and tax policies (4/5). Regarding quit rates, increases were observed after implementing smoking bans (8/9), flavour bans (4/4), multicomponent tobacco control policies (9/12), tax increases (8/12) and campaigns (9/13). In addition, reductions in



the whiskers indicate the 95% CIs. The white lines within the grey squares indicate pooled ORs with narrow CIs, while the black lines indicate the other values. The *p*-score was used to rank interventions on the basis of their effectiveness, and the right panels visually represent this ranking score by showing higher probabilities of effectiveness in dark green and lower probabilities in orange.

smoking prevalence were observed following the implementation of multicomponent tobacco control programmes (19/21), smoking bans (15/18), tax increases (24/30) and campaigns (13/19). Similarly, reductions in tobacco consumption were noted following the enactment of multifaceted tobacco control programmes (13/15), smoking bans (16/21), flavour bans (3/3), tax increases (35/40) and campaigns (13/20). These findings suggest that multicomponent tobacco control programmes, tax increases and smoking bans are the most effective policies for reducing smoking prevalence and cigarette consumption.

# Table 3 | Pairwise meta-analysis of the effects of tobacco policies on smoking prevalence and e-cigarette use, by policy category

Policy	No. of studies <sup>a</sup>	Pooled OR (95% CI)	Р	Heterogeneity (95% CI)					
				l <sup>2</sup> (%)	r <sup>2</sup>				
Smoking prevalence									
Smoking ban	24	0.81 (0.71–0.91)	0.0015	99.8 (NA)	0.06 (0.05–0.30)				
Campaign	16	0.86 (0.80–0.92)	0.0003	84.2 (76–89.6)	0.01 (0-0.03)				
Тах	11	0.89 (0.80–0.99)	0.0369	87.5 (80.3–92)	0.02 (0.0–0.11)				
Youth access policy	7	1.09 (0.76–1.58)	0.5819	92.6 (87.7–95.5)	0.15 (0.05–0.87)				
Flavour ban	4	1.19 (0.51–2.77)	0.5532	89.9 (77.2–95.6)	0.27 (0.04–3.51)				
Ban+tax+HW	2	0.84 (0.74–0.95)	0.0056	0 (NA)	0 (NA)				
Ban+HW	1	1.00 (0.99–1.01)	0.2648						
MPOWER	1	1.00 (0.99–1.00)	0.0459						
HW	1	0.72 (0.67–0.78)	0.0000						
Ban+tax	1	0.85 (0.80–0.91)	0.0000						
Menthol flavour ban	1	0.66 (0.40–1.09)	0.1020						
Secondhand smoke									
Campaign	1	0.69 (0.62–0.78)	0.0000						
Smoking ban	2	2.21 (0.85–5.74)	0.1049	98.4 (NA)	18.8 (NA)				
E-cigarette consumption									
Youth access policy	4	0.97 (0.69–1.38)	0.8221	81.6 (52.1–92.9)	0.02 (0-5.14)				
Campaign	3	0.92 (0.78–1.09)	0.3446	50.7 (0–85.8)	0.16 (0–18.5)				
Flavour ban	3	0.63 (0.07–5.39)	0.4470	94.3 (86.8–97.6)	0.71 (0.16–0.36)				
Smoking ban	2	0.89 (0.82–0.96)	0.0044	31.4 (NA)	0.01 (NA)				
Tobacco retail licensing	2	0.90 (0.85–0.95)	0.0001	74.6 (0–94.3)	0.18 (NA)				
E-cigarette ban	1	0.68 (0.48–0.97)	0.0316						
HW	1	1.25 (0.91–1.70)	0.1674						
PODB	1	1.04 (0.99–1.09)	0.1101						
Тах	1	0.89 (0.83–0.96)	0.0017						

<sup>a</sup>Where two or more papers are included in the meta-analysis, the effect size (coefficient) is pooled; for single studies, the original effect size is presented. MPOWER is a set of six cost-effective and high-impact measures that help countries reduce demand for tobacco. These measures include monitoring tobacco use and prevention policies (M); protecting people from tobacco smoke (P); offering help to quit tobacco use (O); warning about the dangers of tobacco (W); enforcing bans on tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship (E); and raising taxes on tobacco (R).

Furthermore, reduced tobacco sales were reported in nine out of nine studies, primarily attributed to tax increases. All nine studies also indicated higher quit intentions, further highlighting the positive impact of tax increases. In addition, seven out of seven studies reported a significant positive effect of free/discounted NRT or Quitline help on quitting-related behaviour (Supplementary Table 12). However, there was a limited number of studies reporting on smoking intentions, secondhand smoke exposure, smoking relapse and nicotine concentration. The findings for these outcomes were mixed, with most studies indicating no discernible effects resulting from the implementation of new policies.

**Publication bias and sensitivity analysis.** We found evidence of publication bias in the effects of campaigns and health warnings on all outcomes related to smoking cessation (Supplementary Fig. 2). Further evaluation using the trim-and-fill estimation method, which hypothetically imputes the results from a few unpublished studies, confirmed these findings (Supplementary Fig. 2). Sensitivity analyses aimed at examining the source of heterogeneity are presented in Supplementary Information. These analyses included subgroup assessments by country, income category, policy implementation time and policy evaluation time (Supplementary Tables 13–15), as well as exclusions of low-quality studies, highly influential studies (that is, those with large

sample sizes) and cross-sectional studies (Supplementary Figs. 3-5). In the subgroup analyses, no major differences were observed in the findings for policies implemented before or after the enactment of MPOWER (2008) ( $P_{subgroup} > 0.05$ ), except for smoking bans and quit any behaviours ( $P_{subgroup} = 0.04$ ) (Supplementary Table 14). However, when examining the influence of policy evaluation time, we observed that the positive effects of tax increases on guit-related outcomes were primarily driven by evaluations conducted within a 15-month timeframe ( $P_{subgroup} = 0.03$ ) (Supplementary Table 15). Another notable distinction emerged for the impact of smoking bans on smoking prevalence, with positive effects being observed solely in studies evaluating policy impacts within 15 months ( $P_{subgroup} = 0.04$ ). The findings of these sensitivity analyses consistently support the primary results (Supplementary Figs. 3-5), reaffirming that tax increases, health warnings and media campaigns were all significantly associated with increased odds of quitting smoking, quit attempts and quit intentions.

## Discussion

In this systematic review and meta-analysis of 476 studies, we found that tax/price increases, smoking bans and anti-smoking campaigns are the most effective tobacco policies for reducing smoking prevalence and cigarette consumption, as well as increasing quit rates, quit attempts and quit intentions. Health warnings on cigarette

b

#### Smoking prevalence а





#### Rank plot for smoking prevalence С



Fig. 3 Network meta-analysis of the effects of tobacco policies on smoking prevalence and e-cigarette use, by outcome type and policy category, ranked by effect magnitude. a, b, Network forest plots. c,d, Rank plots. The axis ranges differ across panels. Two or more studies for each policy and outcome are included in the network meta-analysis as mentioned in Table 2. In a and b, the squares indicate pooled effect estimates, and the whiskers indicate 95% CIs. The p-score was used to rank interventions on the basis of their effectiveness, and c and d visually represent this ranking score by showing higher probabilities of effectiveness in dark green and lower probabilities in orange.

packages (graphical and/or textual), NRT and flavour bans are also significantly associated with higher odds of quitting smoking. Moreover, flavour bans are effective for reducing e-cigarette consumption.

In line with prior evidence on the price elasticity of tobacco products-indicating that smokers are more likely to quit as prices increase, especially among young adults and individuals with low socio-economic status<sup>504</sup>-we observed significant positive effects of tax/price increases on quit rates, quit attempts and quit intentions and significant negative effects on cigarette consumption and smoking

prevalence. These findings were consistent in both the pairwise and network meta-analyses. Chaloupka et al. estimated the price elasticity of tobacco to average around -0.4 in HICs, meaning that a 10% increase in price reduces overall consumption by 4%, and around -0.5 in LMICs<sup>505</sup>. One possible explanation for this greater sensitivity to price in LMICs is that changes in income resulting from purchasing tobacco products tend to have a greater impact on consumption in resource-constrained settings<sup>506</sup>. Smokers from lower-income groups may therefore benefit the most from tax increases, as these populations typically bear a disproportionate burden of smoking-related health problems and fatalities<sup>507</sup>. Although the meta-analysis results did not show any significant association between tax/price increases and outcomes related to smoking cessation in LMICs, this may be attributed to the limited availability of evidence from these settings.

Our findings also indicate that anti-smoking campaigns have beneficial effects on smoking behaviour. These campaigns, typically conducted through mass media channels, were shown to increase quit rates and reduce smoking prevalence and consumption. However, previous studies have reported mixed effects<sup>508</sup>. While some high-quality studies showed beneficial effects on either quit rates or abstinence rates among adults<sup>12</sup>, a recent meta-analysis reported a non-significant pooled estimate (OR, 1.14; 95% CI, 0.98-1.30) for smoking prevalence among women in the USA<sup>23</sup>. These mixed results may be explained by variations in campaign targets and content<sup>4</sup> and insufficient pilot testing before campaign launch<sup>509</sup>. Factors such as campaign intensity, duration and frequency also play a crucial role. The effect of mass media on smoking cessation was found to be greater for campaigns with higher reach, frequency and duration<sup>510</sup>. Additionally, mass media campaigns are often implemented as part of multicomponent programmes rather than as standalone interventions, making it challenging to determine the extent to which the observed effects can be attributed solely to the campaign. While anti-smoking campaigns can enhance the impact of other strategies such as taxation and smoking bans<sup>511</sup>, our results suggest that they are also valuable as standalone policy tools against smoking.

Our results indicate that health warnings on cigarette packaging, whether in textual, graphical or pictorial form, are the most effective policy in improving outcomes related to smoking cessation. A previous review reported a lack of evidence regarding the beneficial effects of health warnings on smoking initiation, cessation or prevalence, although the number of studies available for analysis was limited  $(n = 4)^4$ . It is worth noting that the effectiveness of health warnings varies significantly across different regions. For example, in Canada, the implementation of highly graphic health warnings had a substantial impact on smokers: 90% of smokers noticed these warnings, 43% became concerned about health risks and 44% expressed an intention to quit smoking<sup>512</sup>. In contrast, teenagers in the USA considered health warnings as "uninformative and irrelevant", despite being aware of them<sup>513</sup>. These mixed results align with the trend in HICs where smokers tend to understand the health consequences depicted by health warnings<sup>514</sup> but may not always act on them<sup>246</sup>. Other studies have reported significant increases in quit rates associated with large graphic health warnings (up to 2%)<sup>508,515</sup>. To maximize the effectiveness of health warnings, they should be prominent, placed on both the front and back surfaces of cigarette packages, and visually distinct from the package's overall design<sup>516</sup>. Similar to anti-smoking campaigns, health warnings serve as a means to convey messages about the health risks associated with tobacco consumption. They have been shown to reduce tobacco use, increase motivation and likelihood to quit, and improve the probability of remaining smoke-free after quitting<sup>508</sup>. Both strategies should be included in multicomponent programmes aimed at promoting smoking cessation. Notably, health warnings have the added advantage of being less expensive to implement<sup>4</sup>.

Regarding policies that subsidize treatments for tobacco dependence, our analysis found a significant association between

#### Table 4 | Pairwise meta-analysis of the effect of tobacco policies on smoking consumption by policy category

Policy	No. of	Pooled coefficient (95% CI)	Р	Heterogeneity (95% CI)				
	studies <sup>a</sup>			l <sup>2</sup> (%)	τ²			
Cigarette consumption								
Тах	27	-0.24 (-0.38 to -0.09)	0.0012	99.9 (NA)	0.18 (0.21 to 1.59)			
Smoking ban	8	-0.09 (-0.22 to 0.04)	0.1636	.1636 74.7 (55.3 to 85.7) 0.03 (0.01				
E-cigarette tax increase	5	0.01 (-0.01 to 0.02)	0.2551	<0.001 (0 to 0)				
Campaign	2	-0.02 (-0.05 to 0.02)	0.3147	0 (0 to 84.7)	<0.001 (0 to 0.05)			
Youth access policy	4	0.01 (0.00 to 0.01)	0.0959	43.1 (0 to 80.9)	0 (0 to 0.35)			
Flavour ban	2	-0.50 (-2.52 to 1.52)	0.6289	91.2 (68 to 97.5)	1.94 (NA)			
Law	2	0.34 (-0.62 to 1.29)	0.4881	84.6 (54.3 to 94.8)	0.56 (0.07 to 24.44)			
E-cigarette ban	1	-0.21 (-1.05 to 0.63)	0.6221					
HW	1	-1.10 (-2.12 to -0.07)	0.0359					
MMC-EXP	2	0.07 (-0.15 to 0.28)	0.5342	85.8 (43.0 to 96.5)	0.02			
Vaping restrictions	1	12.51 (2.15 to 22.87)	0.0179					
E-cigarette consumption								
Тах	4	0.00 (0.00 to 0.01)	0.0551	58.3 (0 to 86.1)	<0.001 (0.00 to 0.00)			
E-cigarette tax increase	4	-0.01 (-0.01 to 0.00)	0.0251	65.4 (0 to 88.2)	<0.001 (0 to 2.64)			
Youth access policy	3	-0.09 (-0.30 to 0.11)	0.3572	85.5 (57.4 to 95)	0.02 (0 to 1.9)			
Smoking ban	1	-0.77 (-2.42 to 0.88)	0.3604					
E-cigarette ban	1	0.23 (-0.80 to 1.26)	0.6601					
Flavour ban 2		-1.21 (-1.99 to -0.43)	0.0023	55.6 (O to 89.2)	0.53 (NA)			
Tobacco sales								
Тах	4	-0.23 (-0.48 to 0.02)	0.0697	86.4 (74.2 to 92.9)	0.06 (0.02 to 33.64)			
Smoking ban	3	-0.11 (-0.15 to -0.08)	0.0000	0 (0 to 89.6)	<0.001 (0 to 0.02)			
E-cigarette tax increase	1	0.05 (0.01 to 0.09)	0.0194					
Campaign	1	-0.09 (-0.16 to -0.02)	0.0173					
Flavour ban	1	-15.9 (-63.75 to 31.95)	0.5149					
E-cigarette sales								
Тах	1	0.00 (0.00 to 0.01)	0.1559					
E-cigarette tax increase	1	-0.01 (-0.07 to 0.05)	0.7471					
Quit attempt/rate								
Тах	1	0.87 (-3.91 to 5.64)	0.7211					
Smoking ban	2	-0.08 (-0.24 to 0.08)	0.3270	49.9 (0 to 81.6)	0.15 (0 to 29.74)			
Youth access policy	1	-0.14 (-0.31 to 0.03)	0.0993					
PODB	1	0.24 (0.07 to 0.40)	0.0045					
NRT	1	0.06 (-0.02 to 0.13)	0.1452					
HW	1	0.04 (-0.12 to 0.20)	0.6328					
MMC-EXP	1	-0.01 (-0.03 to 0.01)	0.2565					
Smoking prevalence								
Тах	1	-5.09 (-9.14 to -1.03)	0.0139					
Smoking ban	2	-0.61 (-4.00 to 2.79)	0.7255					
E-cigarette tax increase	1	0.00 (0.00 to 0.01)	0.0015					
E-cigarette ban	2	-0.01 (-0.03 to 0.02)	0.6668	88.1 (54.1 to 96.9)	<0.001 (NA)			

<sup>a</sup>Where two or more papers are included in the meta-analysis, the effect size (coefficient) is pooled; for single studies, the original effect size is presented.

free/discounted NRT and quit rates. Offering modest doses of free NRT in various forms (for example, gum, transdermal patches, nasal spray, inhalers and oral tablets/lozenges) was estimated to increase quit rates by 9.8 percentage points (95% CI, 7.4–15.7)<sup>25,511,517</sup>. Moreover, when used in conjunction with physician advice, free NRT was shown to double the chance of successful smoking cessation<sup>518</sup>. However, it is

important to recognize that the relatively high costs associated with these policies may pose challenges for implementation in low-resource settings. In our study, we found that flavour bans, whether applied to e-cigarettes or traditional cigarettes, can effectively increase quitting behaviour and reduce e-cigarette consumption. A recent qualitative review by Rogers et al. supported these findings, concluding that

										Toba	ассо ро	olicy									
Outcome	Mult toba prog	ticompo acco co gramme	onent ntrol e	Sn	noking	ban	Та	x increa	ase	M: ca	ass meo Impaigi	dia n	Pict war	orial he	ealth	Fla	avour b	ban	Miscellaneous policies		
Quit attempt	6	0	0	5	1	1	4	1	0	9	0	0	5	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
Quit intention	0	0	0	5	0	1	5	0	0	1	0	1	6	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Quit rate	9	1	2	8	0	1	8	1	3	9	0	4	7	0	4	4	0	0	6	0	0
Smoking prevalence	19	0	2	15	0	3	24	0	6	13	2	4	2	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	2
Smoking intention	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Secondhand smoke exposure	0	0	0	2	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tobacco consumption	13	0	2	16	1	4	35	2	3	13	0	7	5	0	2	3	0	0	1	2	3
E-cigarette consumption	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	1	0	0
Tobacco sales		0	0	0	0	0	9	0	0		0	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	3	0	0
E-cigarette sales	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0

Fig. 4 | Narrative summary of tobacco behaviour change following the implementation of different tobacco policies (n = 238 studies). The number of studies is indicated in each circle. 'Multicomponent tobacco control programme' includes different combinations of multiple tobacco control policies; miscellaneous policies include NRT, Quitline, point-of-sale tobacco display ban, ban on advertising, youth access laws and plain packaging mandates.

Green indicates a positive effect of the tobacco policy–that is, a statistically significant increase or decrease in the targeted outcome favouring the policy. Orange indicates a negative effect of the tobacco policy–that is, a statistically significant increase or decrease in the targeted outcome favouring the control. Grey indicates no effect of the tobacco policy–that is, a statistically insignificant increase or decrease in the targeted outcome.

restrictions on the sale of flavoured or menthol tobacco products significantly and beneficially influenced tobacco consumption (sales), tobacco use prevalence and quitting behaviours<sup>519</sup>. Our findings are also supported by another literature review, concluding that the menthol ban had a substantial impact on smoking cessation and initiation<sup>520</sup>. The effectiveness of flavour bans, particularly on e-cigarettes and cigarettes featuring flavours such as fruit, candy or menthol, has been a subject of debate<sup>519,520</sup>. Some argue that such bans can diminish the appeal of these products to young individuals and discourage initiation. However, others contend that flavour bans may not significantly impact overall consumption, as individuals may switch to unflavoured options or alternative tobacco products. The present findings, along with previous evidence, suggest that bans on flavoured tobacco products may indeed lead to improvements in smoking behaviour.

We found that smoking bans significantly reduced smoking prevalence but did not show a consistent effect on behaviours related to tobacco cessation. Smoking bans at work or in public places are common strategies in tobacco control<sup>521</sup>, yet there is insufficient evidence regarding their effectiveness on outcomes related to smoking cessation. Previous studies<sup>13,522</sup> have suggested that smoke-free workplaces can reduce smoking prevalence by up to 10%. A systematic review of meta-analyses, encompassing four studies, demonstrated that legislative smoking bans were associated with an approximately 28% reduction in smoking rates<sup>23</sup>. However, another review found that banning smoking in public places had limited effects on smoking cessation<sup>8</sup>. While the evidence on smoking bans' effects on smoking behaviour remains inconclusive, such policies may effectively protect non-smokers from exposure to secondhand smoke<sup>523</sup>.

Our network meta-analyses allowed for a comparison and ranking of policy interventions in terms of their effectiveness in changing smoking behaviour. Given the large number of studies included in the meta-analysis, our findings can serve as a valuable reference for future research regarding effect size. The findings presented in this study are expressed in relative terms, providing a clearer understanding of the comparative effectiveness of various policies. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study. First, although 476 studies were included in the review, only 265 were used to conduct pairwise and network meta-analyses. Second, the primary outcome variables in many cases relied on self-reported data, which incurs a higher risk of bias. Third, despite our diligent efforts and thorough manual searches on well-established organizational websites, it remains possible that we inadvertently missed certain grey literature sources. This could be due to some policy evaluations conducted by governments or non-governmental organizations not being intended for publication, or being less likely to be published if they yield non-significant results, introducing potential publication bias. Fourth, the implementation of different policies and methodologies varied considerably across settings, posing a significant challenge when attempting to draw meaningful comparisons of effects across various studies. In particular, the inclusion of a broad range of coordinated anti-smoking activities within media campaigns, targeting diverse audiences, may obscure the effectiveness of individual campaigns focused on specific population groups. Moreover, in quasi-experimental studies, the non-random allocation of study participants may result in residual confounding, potentially biasing the estimation of policy effects<sup>521</sup>. It is therefore crucial to approach the interpretation of pooled effect estimates for different policies with caution. Fifth, most of the included studies were conducted in HICs, limiting the generalizability of the findings to LMICs. Furthermore, the effect size derived from the quasi-experimental design may reflect a local average treatment effect that predominantly concerns specific subpopulations<sup>524</sup>. Sixth, pooling the results of studies with different designs (observational and quasi-experimental) always requires caution. Our sensitivity analyses by study design did not reveal any significant deviations from the

primary analyses. Finally, this study focused on population-level policy interventions and employed indirect comparisons of alternative policy options using a network meta-analysis. One of the critical assumptions of network meta-analysis is transitivity or similarity, meaning that potential effect modifiers (for example, baseline smoking, age and gender) are similarly distributed across interventions. We assessed the baseline distribution of the outcomes and the prevalence of selected modifiers (gender and age) in the included studies, of which more than 90% were from the USA, focused on adult smoking and included both male and female participants. In this assessment, we did not find that the similarity assumption was severely violated (see Methods for more detail). Nevertheless, we cannot exclude the possibility of violation of the assumption due to unobserved heterogeneity in the controlled groups across the included studies. The results should thus be interpreted with caution.

In addition to these limitations, a comprehensive assessment of local cultural and socio-economic contexts is needed to better understand the effectiveness of tobacco control policies. Furthermore, due to cross-country variations in policy schemes, it might be beneficial to consider additional types of predictor variables or model specifications to fine-tune the results. For example, extended analyses could account for the structure of tax policies (such as tax rates), other regulations and policymaking processes. Finally, it is important to acknowledge that there may be a selection bias in policy implementation across countries. Policies perceived as more likely to yield successful outcomes in a particular context are more likely to be implemented, and vice versa.

In summary, this study provides robust evidence supporting the effectiveness of certain policies in altering smoking behaviours. These policies include tax/price increases, health warnings on cigarette packages, information campaigns, smoking bans in public places and workplaces, flavour bans, and the free distribution of NRT. These findings provide a basis for integrating and funding evidence-based, population-level policies effective in promoting smoking cessation and reductions in tobacco consumption. They should be of particular value to policymakers and researchers seeking to design and implement effective tobacco control measures.

## Methods

#### Public and patient involvement

No patients or members of the public were directly involved in this study as no primary data were collected.

#### Search strategy and selection criteria

We searched five electronic databases (PubMed, Embase, CINAHL, Web of Science and EconLit) from their inception to 12 February 2021. The initial search was updated on 1 March 2022 and 3 August 2023. The search strategy comprised a combination of three sets of keywords: (1) tobacco-related terms (for example, 'cigarette', 'tobacco' and 'e-cigarette'), (2) intervention-related terms (for example, 'campaigns', 'advertising', 'smoking ban', 'health warnings', 'legislation', 'tax increase' and 'promotion') and (3) policy-related terms (for example, 'public policy', 'health policy', 'initiatives', 'program(me)s' and 'actions'). The details of the search strategy and results are presented in the supplementary material (Supplementary Tables 16-25). We also checked the reference lists of the included papers, previous systematic reviews, Google Scholar and leading organizational websites, including those of the World Health Organization, the World Bank and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. No data or language restrictions were applied. The inclusion criteria were quantitative studies that used individual-, community-, facility- or country-level data. All populations and individuals in all age groups were included. We included all study designs for policy impact evaluation in a real-world setting. Studies predominantly using simulation or model-based analyses were excluded. Evaluations of research-based interventions, such as lab or field experiments implemented as part of the research, were excluded to focus on public policies. Finally, letters, case series, reviews, commentaries and editorials were excluded. This study was registered on 27 March 2022 with PROSPERO (CRD 42022311392) (https://www.crd.york.ac.uk/prospero/display\_record. php?RecordID=311392) before the start of data extraction.

We considered all types of population-level policies and interventions, such as mass media campaigns, tax/price increases, tobacco bans, pictorial/textual health warnings, minimum legal age, flavour bans and free/discounted NRT implemented by governments or other organizations engaged in reducing tobacco consumption. Detailed information about the intervention characteristics is presented in the supplementary material (Supplementary Table 26). The primary outcome variable was the change in smoking behaviour, such as changes in smoking prevalence, tobacco consumption, quit intentions, quit attempts or quit rates. The secondary outcome variable was the change in tobacco sales.

#### **Data extraction**

Two teams of paired reviewers independently used Rayyan QCRI (http:// www.rayyan.ai/) to screen the identified records by title, abstract and full text. Any disagreement between reviewers was resolved through discussions with the project leader (S. Akter). Information was collected using a preconceived, standardized form (Supplementary Appendix 1). In summary, the following details were retrieved from the studies: the study ID, the title, the first author's last name, the study country, the publication year, the survey year, the study design, the sample size, the sample age, the sample gender, the study settings, the name of the policy, the policy brief, the policy implementation year, the policy evaluation time and the outcome variables. Additionally, detailed information was extracted on various effect sizes, including prevalence, mean, median, percentage change, OR, RR, HR, regression coefficient or correlation by the policy variables. Data were extracted from the primary studies and cross-checked by two independent reviewers, with disagreements resolved through consensus. If an article reported multiple effect estimates resulting from stratified analysis (for example, by sex, geographic area or age group), these estimates were combined to provide a single OR, RR, HR or coefficient for the overall study. When an article provided multiple effect estimates from statistical models adjusted for different covariates, we selected the one that was adjusted for the most variables or supported by the author's conclusions.

#### Study quality assessment

The Newcastle–Ottawa Scale tool<sup>525</sup> was used to assess the quality (or risk of bias) of the observational studies. Controlled before-and-after, interrupted time series and other quasi-experimental studies were coded using Cochrane EPOC tools<sup>526</sup>. Study quality was based on the total score as follows: high ( $\geq$ 6), moderate (4–5) and low (0–3). The supplementary material presents the details of the study quality assessment (Appendix 2). Two reviewers independently assessed the study quality, which was then cross-checked by two other authors. Disagreements were resolved through discussion.

#### Data analysis

The synthesis of the results was performed in two stages. First, a metaanalysis was conducted for studies that provided comprehensive data on effect sizes, such as ORs, RRs, HRs or regression coefficients, along with 95% Cls or standard errors. Second, for studies lacking sufficient quantitative data for meta-analysis or presenting data in a qualitative format, such as percentages or mean differences, a narrative synthesis was employed to summarize their findings. The primary goal of performing both pairwise and network meta-analyses was to identify the most effective tobacco policies for changing smoking behaviour. Effect sizes, especially ORs, RRs, HRs or regression coefficients, along with their Cls or standard errors, are considered the currency of meta-analysis. Continuous outcome variables were generally reported with coefficients and 95% CIs or standard errors, while dichotomous outcome variables were reported with ORs, RRs or HRs with associated 95% CIs or standard errors. Both pairwise and network meta-analyses should use only one statistic scale–OR, RR or HR. Since most studies provided ORs for dichotomous outcome variables, our primary choice for both the pairwise and network meta-analyses was to use ORs. We assumed HRs were similar to RRs on the basis of previous studies<sup>527</sup>. When studies reported RRs, we converted them to ORs. If the incidence of the outcome of interest was less than 10%, we treated ORs as equivalent to RRs, as suggested by prior research<sup>31</sup>. When the incidence exceeded 10%, we applied the conversion formula recommended by Grant et al.<sup>528</sup>: RR = OR/(1 –  $p_0$  + ( $p_0$  × OR)), where  $p_0$  is the control event rate (or baseline risk), which leads to the following:

$$OR = \frac{(1 - p_0) \times RR}{1 - RR \times p_0}$$

Prior to conducting the pairwise and network meta-analyses, we applied a natural logarithm transformation to the effect sizes. This transformation helps stabilize the variance of the effect sizes and ensures that the analysis is based on comparable units. To summarize the effect size of each relevant combination of interventions and outcomes, we performed fixed- or random-effects meta-analysis, depending on the extent of heterogeneity. To assess heterogeneity across the included studies, we calculated  $l^2$  and  $\tau$  statistics<sup>529</sup>. Although  $l^2$  is commonly used to assess heterogeneity in the literature, it is not a perfect measure. Its value heavily depends on the precision of the included studies, whereas the values of  $\tau^2$  and  $\tau$  are insensitive to that effects<sup>529</sup>. Therefore, for reader interest, comparability and accuracy, we reported both common approaches to assess heterogeneity.

To run the network meta-analysis, we log-transformed the effect sizes and used them to simultaneously compare different types of interventions<sup>529</sup>. Forest plots of relative treatment effects were used to visualize each comparison. The p-score was used to rank each intervention, with scores reflecting the degree of certainty that a given intervention was more effective than another<sup>527</sup>. The higher the *p*-score, the higher the probability that the intervention is more effective than others. If we had a minimum of two studies for a specific intervention and outcome, we included those studies in the network meta-analysis. To investigate the sources of heterogeneity, we performed subgroup analyses based on different criteria, including country income categories (HICs versus LMICs), policy implementation time (pre-2008 versus post-2008, following the introduction of the World Health Organization's MPOWER package in 2008) and policy evaluation timing relative to its introduction (within 15 months versus more than 16 months, using the median value). The MPOWER package encompasses evidence-based policies aimed at reducing tobacco consumption and its associated health consequences. Studies have consistently shown that implementing the six strategies outlined in MPOWER effectively reduces tobacco use and its related health complications. Our choice of the year 2008 as a cut-off point was influenced by the anticipation of increased global efforts in tobacco control following this milestone.

We also performed sensitivity analyses for smoking-cessationrelated outcomes by including only high-quality studies, excluding highly influential studies with large sample sizes and small standard errors, and dropping cross-sectional studies. To check the direction of pooled results, we visually compared the pairwise and network meta-analysis results for each outcome. In network meta-analysis, similarity is assumed, suggesting that potential effect modifiers for assessing the association between each intervention and outcome are equally distributed. To assess the evidence of similarity, we looked at the baseline prevalence of some modifiers, including gender distribution, age and prevalence rates of outcomes, for selected tobacco policy measures, such as campaigns, health warnings, tax increases and smoking bans. The results indicated minimal differences across interventions (more than 90% of the studies were from the USA, included both male and female participants, and focused on adult participants), suggesting that the intervention itself influences effectiveness rather than modifier differences. Detailed information is presented in the supplementary material (Supplementary Table 24).

To investigate publication bias, we inspected funnel plots and conducted formal tests (Egger and Begg tests)<sup>530-534</sup>. In cases where publication bias was suspected, the missing study data were imputed using the Duval and Tweedie trim-and-fill method to adjust for funnel plot asymmetry, and small study effects were assessed<sup>535</sup>. Data management was performed using Stata (version 17.1 MP)<sup>536</sup>, and meta-analysis was performed in R (version 3.6.4)<sup>537</sup>. We used a range of R libraries such as netmeta for network meta-analyses and meta for pairwise meta-analyses.

#### Deviations from the registered protocol

During our initial screening, we identified a large number of potential outcomes, leading us to register multiple tobacco-consumption-related behavioural outcomes. After the final study selection and data extraction, we limited the outcomes to those with available quantitative data. Moreover, in the study protocol, we initially planned to use a Bayesian network meta-analysis. However, due to the complexity of the methods and practical computational challenges, we decided to switch to a frequentist network meta-analysis. The *p*-scores from the frequentist approach produce rankings of interventions that are nearly identical to those derived from the surface under the cumulative ranking curve in Bayesian approaches<sup>527</sup>. Finally, our registered protocol mentioned conducting a meta-analysis. However, we reported a 'pairwise meta-analysis' in this paper for clarity, as we performed two types of meta-analysis (pairwise and network meta-analyses).

#### **Reporting summary**

Further information on research design is available in the Nature Portfolio Reporting Summary linked to this article.

#### **Data availability**

This systematic review and meta-analysis was based on data published in previous studies. The data extracted from each original study used for pairwise and network meta-analysis can be found in the data repository system (https://github.com/ryotanakamura1/smoking).

#### **Code availability**

The code for the meta-analysis and network meta-analysis for the current review can be found in the data repository system (https://github. com/ryotanakamura1/smoking).

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## **Author contributions**

S. Akter, M.M.R. and R.N. designed the study. S. Akter and M.M.R. wrote the protocol. S. Akter, S. Aktar and R.S.N. did the study search, study selection and quality assessment. S. Akter, M.M.R. and R.N. supervised all the steps in the review process. M.M.R. did the data analysis and created the figures with S. Akter. S. Akter drafted the paper with M.M.R. and R.S.N. T.R. and R.N. edited the paper and provided critical comments. All authors were involved in the interpretation of the results and revision of the paper and read and approved the final paper. R.N. is the guarantor.

## **Competing interests**

The authors declare no competing interests.

## **Additional information**

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		Our web collection on statistics for biologists contains articles on many of the points above.

# Software and code

Policy information about <u>availability of computer code</u>

Data collection	No software was used
Data analysis	Data analysis was performed using Stata (version 17.1 MP) and R (version 3.6.4) software

For manuscripts utilizing custom algorithms or software that are central to the research but not yet described in published literature, software must be made available to editors and reviewers. We strongly encourage code deposition in a community repository (e.g. GitHub). See the Nature Portfolio guidelines for submitting code & software for further information.

# Data

Policy information about availability of data

All manuscripts must include a data availability statement. This statement should provide the following information, where applicable:

- Accession codes, unique identifiers, or web links for publicly available datasets
- A description of any restrictions on data availability
- For clinical datasets or third party data, please ensure that the statement adheres to our policy

Data extracted for this study can be found in the data repository system. In the main text, the data availability section provides a web link to these publicly available datasets (https://github.com/ryotanakamura1/smoking).

# Research involving human participants, their data, or biological material

Policy information about studies with <u>human participants or human data</u>. See also policy information about <u>sex, gender (identity/presentation)</u>, <u>and sexual orientation</u> and <u>race, ethnicity and racism</u>.

Reporting on sex and gender	Because our study is a systematic review and meta-analysis based on data from original studies, we mentioned the gender of each included paper in the supplemental file. No gender specific analysis was done due to the lack of sufficient data.
Reporting on race, ethnicity, or other socially relevant groupings	We did not include any race or ethnicity specific analysis in our meta-analysis due to lack of sufficient data.
Population characteristics	Population characteristics such as gender for each included study are presented in Supplementary Table 2.
Recruitment	We considered all quantitative studies using individual/ community/ facility/country level data which report policy impacts on tobacco behaviour. The review focused on population-level public policies, and hence research-based interventions in controlled settings were excluded.
Ethics oversight	As this is a systematic review and meta-analysis, no ethical approval was required.

Note that full information on the approval of the study protocol must also be provided in the manuscript.

# Field-specific reporting

Please select the one below that is the best fit for your research. If you are not sure, read the appropriate sections before making your selection.

Life sciences Behavioural & social sciences	Ecological, evolutionary & environmental sciences
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For a reference copy of the document with all sections, see <u>nature.com/documents/nr-reporting-summary-flat.pdf</u>

# Behavioural & social sciences study design

All studies must disclose on these points even when the disclosure is negative.

Study description	The inclusion criteria for this systematic review and meta-analysis are quantitative studies using individual/ community/ facility/ country level data which report policy impacts on tobacco behaviour.
Research sample	We considered all the published studies and gray literature focused on population-level tobacco control policies to improve smoking behavior. We extracted data from each relevant paper and created a data set. As our study involved studies published from all regions of the world including males and females, it is representative.
Sampling strategy	We tried to include all the relevant studies focused on population-level tobacco control policies to improve smoking behavior and extracted data from each individual study. As a result, no sampling strategy is needed in this case.
Data collection	We searched five electronic databases (PubMed, Embase, CINAHL, Web of Science, and EconLit). Two teams of paired reviewers independently used Rayyan QCRI (http://www.rayyan.ai/) to screen the identified records by title, abstract, and full text. Any disagreement between reviewers was resolved through discussions with the project leader (SA). A preconceived and standardized data extraction form was used to collect information (supplementary material, Appendix 1). Data were extracted from the primary studies and cross-checked by two independent reviewers, with disagreements resolved through consensus. Our study is a systematic review and meta-analysis of real world evidence and not a randomized control trial and thus it is not required that the researcher be blinded to experimental conditions and/or the study hypothesis.
Timing	We considered all studies published from their inception to August 3 2023 and extracted data from those studies.
Data exclusions	We included all study designs for policy impact evaluation in a real-world setting. Studies predominantly using simulation or model- based analyses were excluded. Evaluations of research-based interventions, such as lab or field experiments implemented as part of the research, were excluded to focus on public policies. Finally, letters, case series, reviews, commentaries, and editorials (without primary data) were excluded.
Non-participation	Since no participants were involved in the study, non-participation is not applicable here.
Randomization	Since this is a systematic review and meta-analysis of real world evidence, rather than a randomized control trial, randomization is not required.

# Reporting for specific materials, systems and methods

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We require information from authors about some types of materials, experimental systems and methods used in many studies. Here, indicate whether each material, system or method listed is relevant to your study. If you are not sure if a list item applies to your research, read the appropriate section before selecting a response.

Materials & experimental systems	Methods
n/a Involved in the study	n/a Involved in the study
Antibodies	ChIP-seq
Eukaryotic cell lines	Flow cytometry
Palaeontology and archaeology	MRI-based neuroimaging
Animals and other organisms	
Clinical data	
Dual use research of concern	
Plants	

# Plants

Seed stocks	Not applicable
Novel plant genotypes	Not applicable
Authentication	Not applicable