

# From tobacco policy to person

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The background features a complex, abstract composition of overlapping geometric shapes. A large, light pink shape occupies the upper left quadrant. A large, teal shape covers the upper right and central portions. A dark purple shape is visible in the lower left. A dark blue shape is in the lower right. The shapes are layered, creating a sense of depth and movement. The text 'Impact Paragraph' is centered in the teal area.

Impact Paragraph

## **Impact paragraph**

Smoking remains one of the leading causes of death and a key driver of inequalities in health between population subgroups worldwide and in the Netherlands (Bommelé & Willemsen, 2023; Long et al., 2021; World Health Organization, 2008). Whilst over a third of adults who smoke in the Netherlands make a quit attempt each year (Trimbos Institute, 2023), the process of smoking cessation is often fraught with challenges. Determinants of the inequalities in smoking and cessation function at various levels of influence in relation to the individual and are modifiable to varying degrees (Dahlgren & Whitehead, 2006). This thesis explored factors associated with smoking and cessation at the individual, health behaviour, working and living environment, and the general socio-economic, cultural and environment levels. The following paragraph describes the scientific relevance and societal impact of the findings in this thesis. It also outlines the non-scientific products and media attention generated in relation to this thesis.

## **Scientific impact**

We have contributed to the existing body of scientific research in several ways. Firstly, Chapters 2 and 3 provided further evidence on the differential effectiveness of mass media campaigns and behavioural smoking cessation counselling for different subgroups. Our research in Chapters 4 and 5 contribute to implementation science literature by focussing on two areas that until now have received less attention, namely the needs of employees in the implementation of a workplace smoking cessation intervention and the sustainment of community-level smoking cessation interventions, specifically in neighbourhoods with a low socioeconomic position. We provided additional insights into the role of the retail environment in impulse purchasing of tobacco, looking beyond the role of POS displays, and lastly, in Chapter 7, we applied and expanded upon the Policy Dystopia Model (Ulucanlar et al., 2014) to include six specific new arguments that fit within existing domains of the model.

Important findings from this thesis include a lack of structural, long-term funding for tobacco control activities, increased intervention attrition and lower quit success among certain population subgroups, areas for improvement in the reach, participation, and sustainment of smoking cessation interventions, and the predominance of the economic frame used against tobacco control policy.

### *Scientific dissemination activities*

Findings published from four chapters of this thesis so far have all been peer-reviewed and are available as open access articles. Beyond this thesis, research findings have been disseminated in the form of poster and oral presentations at national and international scientific conferences (the Dutch Network for Tobacco Research (NNVT), years 2020 – 2024; the European Chapter of the Society for Research on Nicotine

and Tobacco (SRNT-E), 2020 and 2023; and the European Conference on Tobacco or Health (ECToH), 2023). Our work has also been presented at the Maastricht University *World No Smoking Day 2021* webinar and we organised an international symposium (*Sex and Gender Differences in Tobacco Control*, 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2021, online) to bring together researchers investigating sex and/or gender differences in smoking and cessation to present their findings alongside our own work (Chapter 2). As part of this symposium, a patient was interviewed about their experiences trying to quit smoking as a woman. The independent newspaper for Maastricht University, *Observant*, reported the main takeaway points in an article about sex and gender differences in smoking (Timmermans, 2021).

### **Societal relevance**

Given the practice-focussed nature of many of the chapters within this thesis, we believe that the findings of this thesis have the potential to make societal impact among several groups. The results of this thesis are relevant for policy makers and health insurers because we show how the lack of long-term, structural funding for smoking cessation activities and the once-per-year reimbursement of cessation support are barriers to sustainment of community-level smoking cessation activities, and the provision of mass media campaigns of sufficient intensity. Additionally, a relevant recommendation for policy makers is to implement a licensing system for the sale of tobacco products. In Chapter 7, the tobacco industry arguments opposing policy are relevant for public health professionals and civil society. Moreover, we make recommendations for the role that these stakeholders can play in the narrative surrounding tobacco control policies in (news) media. Chapter 5 is relevant for professionals at the local level as we showed for example how the utilisation of intervention champions and existing local infrastructure can improve the sustainment of community-level smoking cessation support. The findings of Chapters 3 and 4 are also relevant for health care organizations or employers who wish to offer smoking cessation counselling. It can help them to identify subgroups that would benefit from additional support and/or a more intensive approach in the recruitment and delivery of a smoking cessation intervention.

#### *Societal dissemination activities*

We have translated our research findings into more accessible products to aid their dissemination and use in practice. Our findings from Chapter 3 were disseminated in the form of an infographic for the smoking cessation provider, SineFuma, to use in their communication in advising potential clients on which form of counselling to follow (Poole, 2023b). The publication for Chapter 3 was also used as evidence for the individual counselling *Rookvrij! Ook jij?* from SineFuma to achieve the status 'Good indications of effectiveness' in the register of recognised lifestyle interventions

(Rijksinstituut voor Volksgezondheid en Milieu, 2023). Lastly, the findings of Chapter 5 were also published in a guidance document for a broad target group of local professionals looking to implement and sustain community smoking cessation interventions, municipalities, municipal health services, smoking cessation and primary care providers (Poole et al., 2022).

Where possible, we have also tried to garner media attention for our research findings. We have written a blog ('Read between the lines of the tobacco industry') and an opinion piece based on Chapter 7 of this thesis to increase the awareness and attention for the arguments made by the tobacco industry against policy. The blog was published on the website of Research Institute IVO (Poole, 2020) and the opinion piece 'Don't give the tobacco industry a podium' was published in two local Dutch newspapers: *De Limburger* and *Dagblad van het Noorden*, the takeaway message of this piece being the importance of being critical against the industry and a call to stop allowing the tobacco industry to use news media as a platform (Poole, 2023a). Our research from Chapter 7 also has been featured twice on the research journalism website *TabakNee* ('Tobacco No') which follows the activities and lobby of the tobacco industry in the Netherlands (TabakNee, 2023, 2024). The chapter was also used as background research for the programme *Medialogica* ('Het nieuwe rookgordijn' 27<sup>th</sup> November 2024, NPO2), which examined the imagery surrounding alternative tobacco product use and the role of tobacco manufacturers and the media.

Topics tangential to this thesis have been discussed in two blogs published at ivo.nl: 'Stop condemning health behaviour' and 'Reducing the number of tobacco points of sale: do it right the first time!' (Poole, 2022, 2023c), and in an opinion piece 'More needed in the fight against tobacco', published in *De Limburger*, in which I assert the need for a package of measures including a licensing system for tobacco points-of-sale and an increase of the legal age of purchase to 21 (Poole, 2024).