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VITAL SIGNS

Insights: Racial Disparity Affirmed in Tobacco Advertising

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Correction Appended

The density of billboards advertising tobacco products is more than twice as high in black neighborhoods as in white, researchers have found in a review of studies.

The studies were selected from an original group of 131 papers if they were peer-reviewed and directly compared protobacco media messages in African-American and Caucasian markets. That left 11 studies of tobacco advertising, 7 of them involving billboards or other signs, and 4 on magazine advertising.

Five of the billboard studies reported enough data to figure out the density of tobacco advertising in different neighborhoods. Pooling this data, the researchers found that there were 4.5 tobacco billboards per 10,000 residents in white areas and 11.8 per 10,000, or 2.6 times the density, in black neighborhoods. The data also showed that a given billboard was 70 percent more likely to advertise tobacco in a black market compared with a white one. The review appears in the September/October [issue](#) of Public Health Reports.

“If these populations are more exposed, we should be thinking about making sure that we’re doing extra public health interventions to combat that exposure,” said Dr. Brian A. Primack, an assistant professor of medicine and [pediatrics](#) at the [University of Pittsburgh](#) and the lead author of the review. “A specific method for that kind of intervention is the idea of media literacy — teaching people to consciously evaluate the advertising messages that are all around them.”

Correction: September 1, 2007

A brief report in Science Times on Tuesday about a review of studies of pro-tobacco media messages in black and white neighborhoods, including seven studies involving billboard advertising, omitted the dates for the studies, leaving the impression that the analysis included current outdoor advertising. The studies were conducted from 1985 to 1998; outdoor advertising was banned beginning in 1999.

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