

## **A content analysis of illicit tobacco-related crimes reported in Australian media**

ISABEL MECIAR,<sup>1</sup> [CHENEAL PULJEVIC](#),<sup>1,2</sup> CORAL GARTNER<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>NHMRC Centre of Research Excellence on Achieving the Tobacco Endgame, School of Public Health, The University of Queensland, Queensland, Australia; <sup>2</sup> Centre for Health Services Research, The University of Queensland, Queensland, Australia

Presenter's email: [c.puljevic@uq.edu.au](mailto:c.puljevic@uq.edu.au)

**Introduction and Aims:** *Australia's National Drug Strategy Household Survey shows an increase in illicit tobacco use between 2013 and 2019. There are concerns that this black market may continue growing as Australia implements increasingly stringent tobacco control policies, such as large tobacco tax increases. We aimed to examine trends in reporting of illicit tobacco-related crimes in Australia using a content analysis of news articles.*

**Design and Methods:** *A content analysis was performed on 121 news articles identified in the Factiva database about crimes related to illicit tobacco between January 2000 and December 2021. Articles were coded for the type of crime, location, product type, dollar value of seized products, methods of distribution or storage, agencies involved, and other crimes involved.*

**Results:** *There was an increase in the number of illicit-tobacco related crimes reported each year between 2000 and 2021. 163 crime incidents were reported; the most common were illegal tobacco smuggling (38.6%) and illicit tobacco possession (23.3%). A median dollar value of \$2,310,000 was estimated per seizure of illicit products, ranging between \$5,629 and \$84,000,000. Seizure of an estimated 55,523 cartons, 15,010 packs, 177,565,695 cigarette sticks, and 14 boxes of illicit tobacco products were reported between 2000 and 2021. Products were most commonly distributed via shipping containers (26.4%). 25 incidents involved other crimes such as possession of the proceeds of crime (3.1%) or expired visas (2.5%).*

**Discussions and Conclusions:** *Our findings suggest increasing domestic supply of illicit tobacco, potentially undermining the impact of tobacco control policies.*

**Disclosure of Interest Statement:** No competing interests to declare.