

TOBACCO VENDOR DENSITY AND COMPLIANCE WITH TOBACCO CONTROL LAWS IN SIKAR, RAJASTHAN, INDIA



Background

Every year, a staggering 14 lakh lives are lost to tobacco in India alone. Despite the existence of the comprehensive Cigarette and Other Tobacco Products Act (COTPA), the tobacco industry continues to employ various tactics to hinder its effective implementation. To strengthen enforcement of COTPA & other related tobacco control laws, the local self-government of Rajasthan and Municipal council of Sikar have implemented the Tobacco Vendor Licensing (TVL) Policy.

The study was conducted from 27/11/2024 to 15/12/2024 to assess tobacco vendor density, advertising practices, and adherence to tobacco control regulations in three selected wards (Ward no. 39, 40, and 43) of Sikar city, which has a total of 65 wards. These wards were selected based on recommendations from the Municipal Corporation to represent different levels of population density—high, medium, and low ensuring a thorough representation of the city's overall landscape.

Key Findings:

Vendor characteristics

- A total of ninety-four (94) tobacco vendors were identified in all the three (03) surveyed wards.
- The most common vendor type observed was a permanent kiosk ($n=87$, 92.5%) while 7.4% ($n=7$) vendors were temporary kiosks. No independent shops/store/supermarket or street/mobile vendors were found in the three surveyed wards in Sikar city.

Proximity to Educational Institutions

- 24.4% ($n=23$) vendors were located within 100 yards of educational institutions.

Vendor density

- Vendor density was very high with 34 vendors/km² [10 vendors/km of road] across the three wards.
- Vendor density varied significantly between wards [range 659 to 15 vendors/km², 7 to 11 vendors/km of road].
- Whilst the total number of vendors is unknown, based on the population and area of the city it can be estimated that 1-2000 vendors are selling tobacco in Sikar.

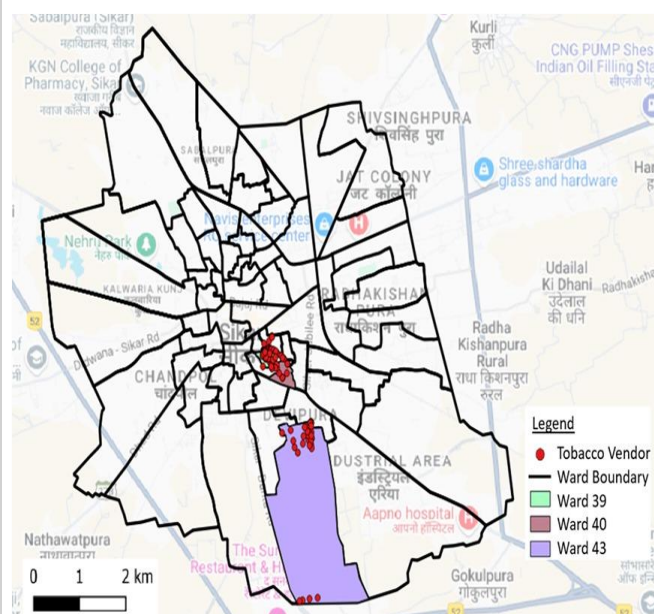


Fig. 1 Tobacco vendor location in three wards in Sikar

Ward number	Ward population (2011)	Ward area (km ²)	Ward road length (km)	Total vendors	Vendor density (vendors / km ²)	Vendor density (vendors / km)	Vendor density (vendors / 10000 people)
39	6415	0.06	3.45	38	659	11	59
40	5913	0.10	2.55	18	173	7	30
43	9217	2.59	3.71	38	15	10	41
3 wards	21545	2.76	9.71	94	34	10	44

Advertising and Signage Compliance

- **Tobacco Advertisements:** 9.5% (n=9) vendors had tobacco advertisements on the outside of the shop/kiosk and none of the vendor advertised tobacco on the inside of the shop/kiosk.
- **Warning Signage:** 8.5% (n=8) vendors complied with the mandatory display of warning signage stating, "Sale of tobacco products to persons less than 18 years of age is a punishable offence"
- **Product Display:** 39.36% (n=37) of vendors displayed tobacco products, of which 89% (n=33) placed them at a height within reach of minors.

Tobacco Product Types and Sales Practices

- The primary types of tobacco products sold included cigarettes, bidis (both loose and in packets), and smokeless tobacco.
- Out of all the tobacco vendors, 50% (n=47) sold loose cigarettes.

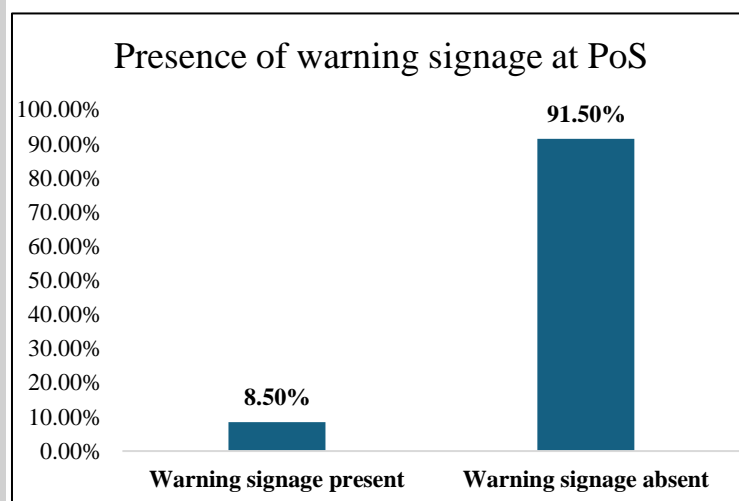


Fig.2 Presence of warning signs at point of sale

Methodology:

An observational survey was conducted in three (03) wards out of the 65 wards in Sikar city. An action plan was developed prior to the survey's initiation, and three teams were formed, each consisting of two investigators who were assigned specific wards. 02 supervisors were designated to oversee and assist the teams in conducting the survey.

A tobacco vendor census was carried out in entire stretch of road in the selected 03 wards to identify the location of all tobacco vendors. Vendors were categorized into four types: independent shops/store/supermarket, permanent kiosks, temporary kiosks, and street/mobile vendors.

Data collection:

The observations included identifying vendors, recording geo-coordinates, photographing displays, noting the proximity of vendors to educational institutions, and evaluating their compliance with the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act (COTPA), 2003. Data collectors assessed vendor adherence to COTPA, particularly concerning the tobacco advertising ban (Section 5) and the prohibition of tobacco sales to minors (Section 6(a)).

The study data were recorded using the EpiCollect mobile app, with route measurements (entire ward covered) tracked via the MapMyWalk app to ensure accuracy and avoid retracing any section. Investigators received training on how to use both apps effectively.

Photographs of storefronts, tobacco displays, and compliance with advertising and warning signage were taken, with notes made if photography was not feasible. The data collection process was designed to minimize disruption to the vendors' operations. Data were uploaded in real-time or stored offline to maintain integrity throughout the survey.

Discussion & Conclusion:

The survey, conducted across 03 wards of Sikar city, revealed that 94 vendors are involved in the sale of tobacco products. Notably, the most common vendor type was a permanent kiosk (n=87, 92.5%). Most of the vendors (91.4%) did not display the legally required warning signage that states, "Sale of tobacco to people under 18 years of age is a punishable offence,". Implementing vendor licensing could help formally register these vendors and regulate implementation of COTPA, 2003.

The current vendor density as calculated is approx. 34 vendors/km² and 10 vendors/km of road across the three wards. By comparison, New York City has approximately 10 tobacco vendors/km² and 4 vendors/km of road.

24.4% (n=23) vendors were located within 100 yards of educational institutions. Fully implementing Tobacco Vendor Licensing and stopping the sales of these vendors would result in an estimated 25% reduction in the number of vendors in Sikar.

Additionally, approximately 40% of tobacco vendors had products on display, of which almost 90% (n=33) displayed their products in ways that were accessible to minors, often placing them within easy reach. Licensing of vendors along with enforcement can play a pivotal role in protecting the youth from tobacco industry tactics.

The findings highlight the need for targeted regulatory enforcement, particularly regarding implementing various sections of COTPA, 2003. Public awareness campaigns, combined with stringent implementation of TVL, could enhance compliance and support broader tobacco control efforts in Sikar.

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