

The Analysis of Youth Perspectives on the Implementation of Act 852: Smoking Products Control for Public Health Act 2024 in Malaysia

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Abstract

The rise in non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in Malaysia highlights a critical issue for public health, particularly when the population of today's youth is now exposed and is being conditioned to accept the normalisation of tobacco products and electronic devices (vapes). The government has gazetted Act 852, the Smoking Products Control for Public Health Act 2024 as an intervention measure. This research is to examine the attitude, level of support and beliefs of youth towards the implementation of Act 852 in Malaysia. The method of this study is a quantitative method by using questionnaire techniques online. The total number of youth respondents interviewed was 150, ranging in age from 18 to 30 years, and selected through purposive sampling techniques, which was determined by them being representative across the different demographics that the policy seeks to address. The results indicate a very high level of support for the Act 852 (94.0%) and 95.3% of respondents indicated that they would act according to the regulations. 68.7% of respondents believe this act is an important tool to ensure future public health. But the trust gap in enforcement exists as 58.0% of respondents feel that access to smoking products in the market is still easy. The study findings indicate that in principle, this policy is well received, however, there is still a need to enhance the enforcement mechanisms to attain the goals of Act 852 without compromising.

Keywords: Youth, Perception, Smoking, Public Health, Policy Implementation

Introduction

Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) still remain one of the largest public health issues at the global and the national levels and tobacco is acknowledged to be a key player in preventable morbidity and mortality. The control of tobacco products is one of the most successful public health interventions in the world, including the implementation of regulations that include tobacco taxation, access and public awareness measures (World Health Organization 2023; World Bank 2020). The World Health Organization estimates that over seven million people die annually globally due to the harmful effects of using and second-hand smoke (WHO, 2024). These global figures are comparable with those of disease burden analyses indicating

that smoking is one of the most important risk factors for cardiovascular disease, cancer and chronic lung disease causing millions of deaths and tens of millions of years of life lost (De Silva et al., 2024).

A paternalistic logic prevails in the debates surrounding public policies on tobacco control, where the state pursues a protective agenda from harm threats affecting citizens. On the other hand, policy theory highlights that the success of interventions goes beyond what the legislation itself contains; it also depends on the social legitimacy attributed to the targeted population (Aly et al., 2022). Even if policies are considered relevant for public health and not encroaching on autonomy, acceptability and compliance might be low if they are perceived as irrelevant to the communities' lived experience.

Social normalization, digital media and more advanced marketing tactics from the tobacco industry also shape youth perceptions of nicotine and tobacco use. Despite tobacco and vaping control efforts, continued exposure to content that minimizes the risks of smoking and vaping exposure has been found to further decrease perceptions of harm among younger generations (Rahman et al., 2019; Aly et al., 2022). This phenomenon brings up crucial questions regarding policy design and communication to create resonance with those groups most vulnerable to the problem. This study therefore seeks to examine the perceptions, attitudes, compliance intentions and knowledge of youth about tobacco control policies in Malaysia and explore what they think is fair and effective about enforcement. The authors state that a combination of empirical data and a theoretical approach shows that the success of public health policies depends on other factors, such as how much social legitimacy the generation that is the target of the policy has.

While this paternalistic approach through the introduction of Act 852 can be considered a proactive step towards solving the problem of non-communicable diseases (NCDs), there is a significant gap in understanding how the Act 852 is accepted organically by its target audience, which are the youth. The youth voice is of paramount importance in this discourse, since they are the most vulnerable group to dynamic marketing strategies in the industry and complex social normalization. If social legitimacy is not established at the beginning of implementation, the law of Act 852 could be a mere symbolic law without effective compliance on the ground. If they are not supported and values-aligned, there is a risk that in the long term the tobacco control policy will be structurally unachievable. This is because the effectiveness of public health interventions varies depending not only on the extent to which they are known to be legitimate, fair and relevant, but also on their acceptance by the community that they are the primary target of the intervention. Hence, the present study is aimed to close this gap by analysing the perceptions of youth as part and parcel of the sustainability of future national health policies.

While previous literature in Malaysia has extensively documented the epidemiological prevalence of smoking and vaping (e.g., Lim et al., 2022; Rahman et al., 2019), these studies often treat youth merely as passive statistical subjects within clinical boundaries. The gazettement of Act 852 in 2024 marks a critical paradigm shift from conventional, localized tobacco control to a highly comprehensive public health intervention. However, a clearer and more compelling justification for selecting this topic lies in the contemporary vulnerability and evolving behavioral dynamics of the youth demographic post-2024. Today's youth are

not only exposed to aggressive, technologically advanced marketing tactics by the tobacco industry, but they are also deeply embedded in digital spaces that actively normalize nicotine consumption (Aly et al., 2022). Recent evidence indicates that tobacco prevalence among the population remains alarmingly stagnant despite continuous legislative shifts (Lim et al., 2025). Furthermore, recent regional studies emphasize that top-down legislation frequently fails if the state overlooks how target populations organically perceive policy fairness and legitimacy (Abas et al., 2024; Nasir & Rahman, 2025). Therefore, analyzing youth perspectives immediately post-implementation is critically justified; it determines whether the policy will gain organic social legitimacy or suffer from structural non-compliance from the very generation expected to carry its civic burden.

Literature Review

Tobacco use is a major cause of early deaths around the world, causing more than seven million deaths per year from tobacco smoking and exposure to second hand smoke (World Health Organization, 2023). Smoking continues to be a big health problem in Malaysia, especially cardiovascular disease and lung cancer (Lim et al., 2022). Although some control policies have been developed, the high youth use rates reflect the fact that this use cannot be described as simply an individual decision, but as a social behavior that is shaped by peers' norms and digital spaces and communities (Aly et al., 2022).

Social Construction and Policy Design Theory is the theory that says how a target group is socially constructed in political discourse will affect the policy design. Policies are more regulative and punitive if youth who smoke are viewed as a deviant group, and more preventive and supportive if they are viewed as a risk group in need of protection. This social entity has a direct impact on policy legitimacy, allowing for the perception of fairness to be essential to acceptance and compliance, as well as the consistency of enforcement and level of perceived stigma. A perception concept is a crucial part of the analysis of the effectiveness of policy implementation. Youth compliance intentions are affected by perceptions of regulatory clarity, effectiveness of enforcement, and equity of policy burden. This study hypothesizes that knowledge affects attitudes, attitudes affect intentions to comply, and perceptions of fairness, effectiveness of enforcement and stigma are important to policy acceptance. In general, the literature indicates that the effectiveness of tobacco control is not limited to the enforcement of the law, but also relies on social acceptability amongst younger generations. Adverse exposure to pro-smoking and vaping messaging on digital platforms has been found to have a significant impact on the perception of the risks of smoking and vaping among youth (Aly et al., 2022).

Despite the abundance of global and national literature on the health risks and economic burdens of tobacco (De Silva et al., 2024; World Health Organization, 2023), a significant research gap persists regarding how comprehensive public health regulations are organically internalized by youth in developing nations. Most current policy evaluations rely heavily on bureaucratic or punitive enforcement metrics rather than assessing 'normative legitimacy' from the ground up. This study addresses this exact empirical void by applying the Social Construction and Policy Design Theory (SCPDT), originally conceptualized by Schneider and Ingram (1993). While classical applications of SCPDT often look at static policy designs, modern public health challenges require examining how digital shifts—such as social media algorithms, peer-driven online runner systems, and e-commerce supply chains—disrupt a

policy's structural justice and enforcement efficiency (OECD, 2021; Global Tobacco Control Monitor, 2023). Contemporary legislative updates, such as the generational endgame (GEG) discourse in Southeast Asia, demonstrate that policies risk becoming merely symbolic if the target group's lived experience is marginalized (Sari & Wong, 2024). By investigating whether Malaysian youth view themselves as a targeted 'deviant' group or a 'protected' cohort under Act 852, this research bridges the gap between the symbolic legislative text and the lived, highly digitized realities of the contemporary youth generation.

Research Method

The approach of this study is quantitative and the method used is an online questionnaire (cross section study). The researcher used Google Form format to collect the questionnaire data and distributed through student connections in universities in Malaysia and distribution via social media platforms (WhatsApp Group, Instagram applications) to get the data findings widely distributed to the Malaysian youth. The online option was selected to make this accessible to today's youth who are active users of digital technology. The purposive sampling method was also adopted and the selection criteria for respondents were Malaysian citizens between 18-30 years old. As part of this study, they were also briefed with the purpose of this study, which was on the perceptions of the implementation of Act 852 in Malaysia.

This study was conducted on 150 respondents from different zones and institutions. The study respondents consisted of youth in Malaysia with the distribution of respondents according to zones in Malaysia, namely Central (Selangor, Kuala Lumpur, Putrajaya), East Coast (Kelantan, Terengganu, Pahang), Northern (Perlis, Kedah, Penang, Perak), Southern (Negeri Sembilan, Melaka, Johor), Sabah and Sarawak.

This research applied questionnaires as instruments, which are divided into several main parts. Part A deals with the demographic profile of the respondents (such as gender, age, race, education, being employed, and being a smoker). The next section focused on youth's knowledge, attitudes and perceptions on the implementation of the Tobacco Products Control Act 2024 (Act 852), their perception of the effectiveness of its implementation and their acceptance of the smoking ban policy. Items for the question were designed to measure the degree of agreement on a 5-point Likert scale that ranges from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

This research offers valuable preliminary information on the views of the youth, but there are some limitations which should be noted for data interpretation. The findings are based on a small sample size of 150 respondents of the youth group aged between 18 and 30 years old and only represent a subset of the youth population in Malaysia nationally. Furthermore, instrument reliability obtained by Cronbach's Alpha for each construct tested has value <0.950 which is very good, but future studies are recommended to expand the sampling scale to make the results more widely applicable. Data analysis was performed with the software application SPSS Statistics from IBM for obtaining descriptive data of the frequency and percentage for each construct tested.

Research Results and Discussion

Respondent Demographic Profile

According to the findings of the study, there were a total of 150 respondents that participated in this survey. The demographic profile analysis revealed that the majority of the respondents were males (62.7%) with the rest being females (37.3%). This gender disproportion is analytically significant since nicotine use and its social normalisation have been reported to be higher among males than females in the literature related to tobacco control, and therefore the results of this study could highlight social experiences and perceptions among males.

From the perspective of ethnicity, the majority of the respondents were Malays (62.0%), followed by Sabah/Sarawak Bumiputera (18.0%), Chinese (11.3%) and Indian (8.7%). In between, the age distribution revealed that the age group of 24-26 years old contributed the most (41.3%) and the age group of 21-23 years old contributed (25.3%). As far as tobacco use status is concerned, the participants were found to be 50.0% who had never used tobacco or vaping and 41.3% who were current tobacco or vaping users. As far as geography is concerned, it can be seen that it is almost the same, with 58% of the respondents from the urban areas and 42% from the rural areas. From this data, it can be concluded that this study has been able to obtain a balanced data from the two aspects first of all from the two groups of smokers and non-smokers and also from the geographical data of the respondents in Malaysia.

Table 4.1
Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N=150)

Category	Numbers (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
- Female	56	37.3
- Male	94	62.7
Age		
- 18 - 20	26	17.3
- 21 - 23	38	25.3
- 24 - 26	62	41.3
- 27 - 30	24	16.0
Ethnicity		
- Bumiputera Sabah / Sarawak	27	18.0
- Chinese	17	11.3
- Indian	13	8.7
- Malay	93	62.0

Education level		
- Bachelor's degree	59	39.3
- Diploma, Pre-University, College Matriculation, Foundation	42	28.0
- Master's degree	12	8.0
- Phd	1	0.7
- Secondary school	36	24.0
Employment status		
- Employed	69	46.0
- Student	71	47.3
- Unemployed	10	6.7
Residential zone		
- Central (Selangor, Kuala Lumpur, Putrajaya)	24	16.0
- East Coast (Kelantan, Terengganu, Pahang)	25	16.7
- Northern (Perlis, Kedah, Penang, Perak)	23	15.3
- Sabah	25	16.7
- Sarawak	24	16.0
- Southern (Negeri Sembilan, Melaka, Johor)	29	19.3
Residential Area		
- City	87	58.0
- Rural	63	42.0
Tobacco use status		
- Current smoker / vaper	62	41.3
- Former smoker / vaper	13	8.7
- Never smoked or vaped	75	50.0
Total	N = 150	100%

Knowledge, Attitudes, and Actions Towards the Policy

The study results indicated that youth have a good awareness of the need for this policy for public health. 68.7% agreed strongly that this regulation is needed to protect public health and 59.3% of respondents were very concerned about the health impacts of cigarettes/vaping on youth. There is also some confusion about specifics of the regulation, as 25.3% of respondents agree and 21.3% strongly agree that they are still unclear on what is

allowed and what is not under this regulation. This means the policy's purpose is known but the Government's communication on how the mechanisms for putting the policy into practice should be improved. Most of the respondents also had a high level of intention to comply with the set regulations, with 66.7% strongly agree.

Table 4.2
Knowledge, Attitudes, and Actions Towards the Policy (N=150)

	1 (Strongly Disagree)	2 (Disagree)	3 (Neutral)	4 (Agree)	5 (Strongly Agree)	N (%)
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	
I know about Act 852 and when the act came into effect.	13 (8.7%)	16 (10.7%)	32 (21.3%)	55 (36.7%)	34 (22.7%)	150 (100%)
I know the main purpose of Act 852 was introduced.	16 (10.7%)	13 (8.7%)	24 (16.0%)	51 (34.0%)	46 (30.7%)	150 (100%)
I know where to get official information about the Cigarette-Vape Act/regulations.	14 (9.3%)	14 (9.3%)	28 (18.7%)	48 (32.0%)	46 (30.7%)	150 (100%)
I'm still confused about what is allowed and prohibited under these rules.	20 (13.3%)	24 (16.0%)	36 (24.0%)	38 (25.3%)	32 (21.3%)	150 (100%)
I am worried about the health effects of cigarettes/vaping on youth.	6 (4.0%)	6 (4.0%)	12 (8.0%)	37 (24.7%)	89 (59.3%)	150 (100%)
I believe this regulation is necessary to protect public health	6 (4.0%)	3 (2.0%)	10 (6.7%)	28 (18.7%)	103 (68.7%)	150 (100%)
I feel the implementation of this rule is fair.	5 (3.3%)	6 (4.0%)	19 (12.7%)	28 (18.7%)	92 (61.3%)	150 (100%)
I feel this rule is too strict and unreasonable.	42 (28.0%)	33 (22.0%)	17 (11.3%)	27 (18.0%)	31 (20.7%)	150 (100%)
I intend to comply with the rules.	6 (4.0%)	3 (2.0%)	11 (7.3%)	30 (20.0%)	100 (66.7%)	150 (100%)
If I were a user, I intend to cut down/quit in the next 6 months.	9 (6.0%)	6 (4.0%)	24 (16.0%)	23 (15.3%)	88 (58.7%)	150 (100%)
I will advise my peers not to sell/buy to minors.	3 (2.0%)	7 (4.7%)	14 (9.3%)	29 (19.3%)	97 (64.7%)	150 (100%)

The analysis showed that the level of knowledge of respondents on tobacco control policies was at a moderate to high level. Most said they knew about Act 852 and why it was being introduced. Statistically, there was a very good and significant Pearson correlation between knowledge of the existence of the act and knowledge of the purpose of the act, $r = 0.745$, $p < 0.01$. This value signifies that the knowledge dimension is not isolated, but rather, a relatively stable construct in terms of policy awareness among youth. Neither the correlation between knowledge and belief in the need for the policy to protect public health nor that between attitude and knowledge dimensions can be overlooked in this context. A very strong positive correlation was observed between the need for the policy and intention to comply with the regulations ($r = 0.737$, $p < 0.01$). This was a finding which corroborates that the attitude towards the policy has a significant effect on the intention to comply. Notably, health concerns about vaping and cigarettes had a strong correlation with compliance intentions as well ($r = 0.714$, $p < 0.01$). This indicates that the compliance of the respondents is more due to health motives than punishment.

The result of the study showed that the knowledge of the respondents on the main objectives of Act 852 was highly correlated to the intention to comply with the regulation with the value of $r = 0.737$, p value < 0.01 . Theoretically it reflects the notion of the "normative legitimacy" in which people are more likely to obey laws that they believe are just in purpose and have a "real moral justification". According to the World Health Organization report (2024), it is important to build awareness of the dangers of tobacco products, as there are still millions of deaths caused by exposure to cigarette smoke worldwide each year. The concept of perception is also effective to youth as demonstrated by the data that concern regarding health impacts has a value of $r = 0.714$ and is the important factor affecting compliance compared to the fear of legal punishment. This is consistent with the study by De Silva et al., (2024) based on the internalization of these values of health, which resulted in a more sustainable concept of civil participation, smoking being a major risk factor for chronic diseases.

The analysis also reveals, however, that some respondents lack clarity concerning what is allowed and what is not by the regulation. This situation raises an important paradox. Although normative support for health goals is high, regulatory ambiguity has the potential to undermine the effectiveness of implementation. This can be understood as a mismatch between the desired intent of the policy and the lived reality of the target group as part of the theory of Social Construction and Policy Design. But if the law's text is seen as legitimate and appropriate, but its implementation is perceived as unclear, then legitimacy is symbolic and not entirely embedded in practice.

Perceptions of Justice, Stigma and Social Constructs

This section focuses on more normative and symbolic aspects of policy implementation including the meaning that youth make of justice and stigma and responsibility in tobacco control. Results reveal that most respondents consider the policy is aimed at not just punishment, but protection of youth. Because the perception of protecting is crucial, and it indicates that youth is not a wholly bad and/or abnormally deviant social construction in the policy world. Studying youth perspectives, it was found that peer influence is an influential factor in smoking. 57.3% strongly agreed that peer pressure/influence is the primary reason why youth start smoking or vaping. In addition, there is a perception that this issue stems

from the industry and vendors, not solely the fault of the youth themselves, with 32.7% strongly agreeing with this statement. Policy justice: 40.7% strongly agree that this policy is fairly shared by vendors and the industry, not just young people.

Social Construction and Policy Design Theory (SCPDT) highlights the importance of the social construction of the target group in political discourse for measuring the effectiveness of a policy design. This framework was first introduced by Schneider and Ingram (1993) who claim that the design of a policy is closely tied to the way target populations are socially constructed and conceived by policymakers. Youth are defined as a protected population instead of a deviant or punitive group in the context of Act 852: 58.7% agreed that the act is protective. Such positive construction is quite meaningful as it can raise the level of acceptance of the policy implementation. The notion of stigma is a challenge, however, as 47.3% of respondents believe youth using cigarettes or vaping products are often stigmatized by society. The young generation's risk perception is often misled by social normalization and advanced marketing tactics used in the industry, according to Rahman et al., (2019) and Aly et al., (2022). A fair allocation of the responsibility to industry and sellers, which is 40.7%, instead of solely on the youth, is a strategic move which enhances structural justice in the implementation of this policy.

Table 4.3

Perceptions of Justice, Stigma and Social Constructs (N=150)

	1 (Strongly Disagree)	2 (Disagree)	3 (Neutral)	4 (Agree)	5 (Strongly Agree)	N (%)
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	
This Act aims more to protect youth than to punish them.	6 (4.0%)	8 (5.3%)	6 (4.0%)	42 (28.0%)	88 (58.7%)	150 (100%)
I feel that youth who use cigarettes/vapes are often stigmatized in society.	6 (4.0%)	9 (6.0%)	23 (15.3%)	41 (27.3%)	71 (47.3%)	150 (100%)
In my community/peers, smoking/vaping is considered normal.	12 (8.0%)	6 (4.0%)	15 (10.0%)	39 (26.0%)	78 (52.0%)	150 (100%)
The youth cigarette/vaping issue stems more from the sellers/industry than the youth themselves.	12 (8.0%)	30 (20.0%)	28 (18.7%)	31 (20.7%)	49 (32.7%)	150 (100%)
Peer pressure/influence is the main reason youth start smoking/vaping	6 (4.0%)	4 (2.7%)	18 (12.0%)	36 (24.0%)	86 (57.3%)	150 (100%)
The regulations of Act 852 relating to youth are clear to me.	4 (2.7%)	11 (7.3%)	23 (15.3%)	47 (31.3%)	65 (43.3%)	150 (100%)
Official information about the rules is easy to understand.	5 (3.3%)	7 (4.7%)	20 (13.3%)	58 (38.7%)	60 (40.0%)	150 (100%)

This policy places a fair burden on sellers/industry, not solely on youth.	7 (4.7%)	13 (8.7%)	26 (17.3%)	43 (28.7%)	61 (40.7%)	150 (100%)
The benefits of this policy to public health outweigh the inconveniences it causes.	6 (4.0%)	7 (4.7%)	13 (8.7%)	55 (36.7%)	69 (46.0%)	150 (100%)
I believe the risk of being prosecuted for violating the rules is high.	6 (4.0%)	7 (4.7%)	18 (12.0%)	47 (31.3%)	72 (48.0%)	150 (100%)
The government's campaign/explanation about Act 852 is not reaching youth like me.	12 (8.0%)	22 (14.7%)	21 (14.0%)	47 (31.3%)	48 (32.0%)	150 (100%)

Within the framework of Social Construction and Policy Design Theory also, this finding shows that youth in this study are more likely to interpret themselves as a protected group than as a deviant group that needs to be disciplined. This construct has direct implications for policy legitimacy. When the target group feels that the policy is formulated for their well-being and not to control or punish, the level of acceptance increases.

However, the analysis also shows that some respondents feel that there is a stigma against youth who smoke. In the theoretical model, the perception of stigma has the potential to reduce legitimacy because it creates a sense of social isolation. Stigmatization may unintentionally reduce policy effectiveness by alienating target groups, thereby weakening voluntary compliance (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022). If youth who smoke feel that they are negatively labeled, they may see the policy as a mechanism of social control and not as a public health intervention. In addition, the perception of the fairness of the policy burden is also an important dimension. Respondents who believe that the responsibility is not placed entirely on youth but also involves sellers and industry show a higher level of acceptance. This is in line with legitimacy theory which emphasizes that policies that are fairly distributed in terms of responsibility are more easily accepted. In the context of tobacco control, distributing the burden to the supply chain and not only to consumers increases the perception of structural justice.

This dimension is also related to compliance intentions. Based on previous correlation findings, compliance intentions were significantly associated with beliefs that the policy was necessary for public health and with concerns about health risks. This suggests that despite perceptions of stigma in some segments, public health-based normative legitimacy is still the dominant factor shaping compliance tendencies.

Perception of Implementation Effectiveness

This section assesses youth confidence in the enforcement of Act 852. The results of the study show significant skepticism regarding the effectiveness of enforcement on the ground. The majority of respondents (58.0%) strongly agreed that "even though there are regulations, it is still easy for youth to obtain cigarettes/vapes". Furthermore, 38.0% of respondents strongly agreed that cigaretteThe display or promotion of vaping in their area is still the same as before the implementation of this act. This perception is further reinforced by the data that

39.3% of respondents strongly agree that Act 852 reduces youth access, but the percentage who agree that sellers check age before selling is only 29.3% (Strongly Agree). The gap between the existence of policy and the reality of enforcement is a major challenge that needs to be addressed to ensure the success of the objectives of this act. The majority of respondents stated that despite the regulations implemented, access to cigarettes and vaping is still easy to obtain by youth in Malaysia. This perception indicates that there is a gap between the text of the law and the actual social experiences of youth. However, there are also similar implementation gaps that have been observed in other countries where regulatory frameworks exist but enforcement capacity is still inconsistent (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2021).

From a policy implementation perspective, there is a significant gap between the normative goals of the act and the actual reality on the ground. Despite high support for the act, 58.0% of respondents stated that smoking products were still easily available to youth even after the regulation was enforced. This inconsistency indicates that institutional legitimacy can be undermined if youth’s perception of the efficiency of enforcement agencies is not in line with the legal text. Lim et al. (2025) stated that the prevalence of tobacco use among adults in Malaysia remains high at 19 percent, which calls for more innovative enforcement mechanisms. This study also revealed that the concept of youth participation in complying with the act is threatened by the changing market ecosystem, especially through online sales that make access control difficult. Failure to bridge this implementation gap risks causing the goals of Act 852 to be seen as purely symbolic. As emphasized by Aly et al., (2022) , the effectiveness of an intervention is not only determined by the content of the law but also by the social legitimacy felt by the target group.

Table 4.4
Perception of Implementation Effectiveness (N=150)

	1 (Strongly Disagree)	2 (Disagree)	3 (Neutral)	4 (Agree)	5 (Strongly Agree)	N (%)
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	
I often see inspections/enforcement related to cigarettes/vaping in my area.	26 (17.3%)	22 (14.7%)	24 (16.0%)	51 (34.0%)	27 (18.0%)	150 (100%)
Sellers in my area usually check age before selling cigarettes/vapes.	29 (19.3%)	27 (18.0%)	28 (18.7%)	22 (14.7%)	44 (29.3%)	150 (100%)
Enforcement appears consistent between different premises/stores.	12 (8.0%)	16 (10.7%)	34 (22.7%)	49 (32.7%)	39 (26.0%)	150 (100%)
Enforcement is carried out fairly and without bias.	8 (5.3%)	8 (5.3%)	45 (30.0%)	53 (35.3%)	36 (24.0%)	150 (100%)

Act 852 reduces youth access to cigarettes/vapes.	4 (2.7%)	8 (5.3%)	30 (20.0%)	49 (32.7%)	59 (39.3%)	150 (100%)
After the implementation of Act 852, cigarette/vape exhibitions/promotions in my area are still the same as before.	12 (8.0%)	14 (9.3%)	25 (16.7%)	42 (28.0%)	57 (38.0%)	150 (100%)
Even though there are regulations, it is still easy for youth to obtain cigarettes/vapes.	6 (4.0%)	8 (5.3%)	12 (8.0%)	37 (24.7%)	87 (58.0%)	150 (100%)
Online/runner sales make controlling cigarette/vape products more difficult	7 (4.7%)	11 (7.3%)	20 (13.3%)	50 (33.3%)	62 (41.3%)	150 (100%)
Changing smoking/vaping habits requires a major change in lifestyle.	5 (3.3%)	4 (2.7%)	15 (10.0%)	38 (25.3%)	88 (58.7%)	150 (100%)
Urban/rural differences affect the level of access and enforcement.	5 (3.3%)	7 (4.7%)	19 (12.7%)	48 (32.0%)	71 (47.3%)	150 (100%)
The regulations under Act 852 are clear enough to be enforced.	4 (2.7%)	5 (3.3%)	17 (11.3%)	57 (38.0%)	67 (44.7%)	150 (100%)
The authorities have sufficient resources for enforcement (officers/operations).	4 (2.7%)	9 (6.0%)	31 (20.7%)	52 (34.7%)	54 (36.0%)	150 (100%)
Relevant agencies cooperate well in the implementation of Act 852.	5 (3.3%)	7 (4.7%)	34 (22.7%)	53 (35.3%)	51 (34.0%)	150 (100%)
The procedure for taking action against violations appears clear and consistent.	3 (2.0%)	8 (5.3%)	27 (18.0%)	54 (36.0%)	58 (38.7%)	150 (100%)
The social norms around me still accept cigarettes/vaping.	2 (1.3%)	10 (6.7%)	20 (13.3%)	35 (23.3%)	83 (55.3%)	150 (100%)
Parental/school/community support influences youth compliance.	4 (2.7%)	10 (6.7%)	15 (10.0%)	39 (26.0%)	82 (54.7%)	150 (100%)
The influence of social media has increased youth interest in vaping/cigarettes.	9 (6.0%)	5 (3.3%)	11 (7.3%)	51 (34.0%)	74 (49.3%)	150 (100%)

Theoretically, consistency-enforcement is a crucial part of trust in institutions. However, if youth feel vendors are not always checking their age or product promotions continue then their perceptions of the effectiveness of the policy will be influenced. In this context, it is influenced by policy goals and the extent of enforcement measures visibility and consistency. Compliance intentions are significantly associated with beliefs that the policy is needed to protect public health and with concerns about health risks, as revealed by correlation analysis. The connection between perceptions of enforcement and intentions to comply is less powerful than that of the normative dimension however. This indicates that respondents' compliance is more of an internalization of health values than it is based on the fear of legal risk.

This discovery poses a policy conundrum. Youth align with health objectives and are willing to do what's needed, yet believe that enforcement is not working. This situation may be viewed as a mismatch between the symbolic nature of the policy and the actual design of the structure in which it will be implemented in the context of Social Construction and Policy Design Theory. Normative legitimacy can be high but institutional legitimacy can erode over a period of time if the implementation structure is not consistent.

Furthermore, respondents also noted that online sales, middlemen etc. present challenges in controlling tobacco products. This indicates that new innovative enforcement mechanisms are needed to adapt to the changing market ecosystem. Policies may be perceived as not being responsive to the present social situation if they are not adapted to changing access channels. The surge of digital marketplaces has made it much more challenging to control tobacco use, especially regarding youth access (World Health Organization, 2023).

Youth Support Against Act 852

This part looks into the most important measure for confirming the effectiveness of the first phase of policy implementation, in terms of the degree of open support and implementation intention among youth. Results indicate that most of the respondents agreed with the policy and were willing to accept the regulations if they meet one of the designated categories. This is a factor of support at a high level, which shows the normative legitimacy of the policy at the principle level.

The last analysis in this study is on the most important indicator, which is the degree of absolute support and compliance with the law (compliance intention). The outcomes of the study revealed there was a clear consensus amongst the respondents. Of the 141 respondents, 94.0% supported Act 852 completely. A small minority of 6 (4.0%) said "Not Sure" and 3 (2.0%) said "No". This is a very strong level of support and shows that the social media narrative of youth opposition does not necessarily reflect the voice of the silent majority that cares about public health.

Concurrently, the compliance level on personal measures also showed positive statistics in line with this support. Of the 143 who were asked the hypothetical question of whether they belonged to the prohibited cohort, 95.3% responded "Yes" to the questions regarding their commitment to comply with the regulation. A few felt "Unsure" (3.3%) and 2 people (1.3%) expressed reluctance "No". This finding is very significant because it shows that

although youth are skeptical of the efficiency of government enforcement, they have a high level of civic integrity in principle and personally to comply with the law for the common good.

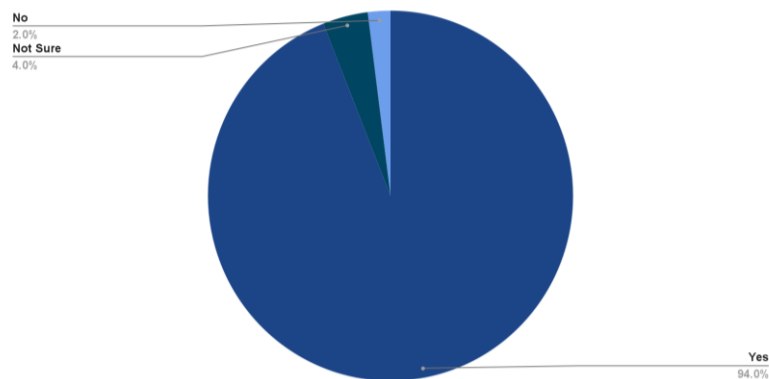


Figure 4.1: Youth Support for the Implementation of Act 852

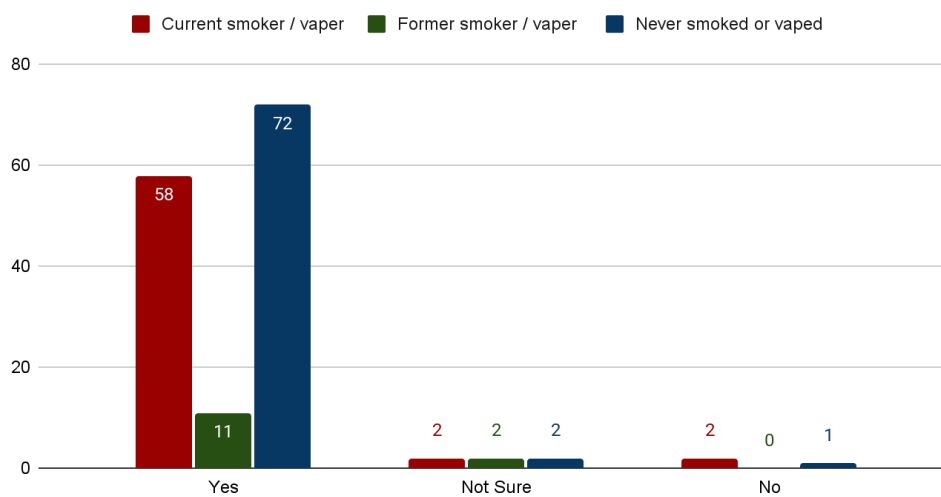


Figure 4.2: Youth Support for the Implementation of Act 852 Based on Smoking Status

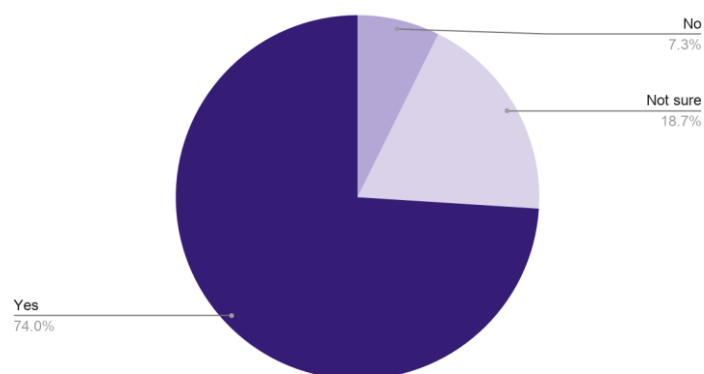


Figure 4.3: Support in Complying with the Laws Implementing Act 852

In conclusion, the absolute support of 94.0% of respondents reflects the government's success in building a strong social legitimacy foundation for Act 852. The level of personal commitment to compliance, which reached 95.3%, highlights the high quality of the concept

of civil participation among youth in Malaysia. This finding proves that the civic integrity of youth is very responsive to policies aimed at the common good. Continuous strengthening through clear communication strategies and consistent enforcement will ensure that this public health aspiration can be fully realized, thus reducing the burden of non-communicable diseases which are now a major threat to national productivity.

Conclusions

This study indicates that young people in the study sample have a high degree of awareness of the public health rationale behind tobacco control policies and they have strong normative support for implementing tobacco control policies. The results of the correlation analysis showed that the correlation between knowledge and attitudes was significant and the correlation between attitudes and compliance intentions was very strong. This finding indicates that internalization of public health values is a key driver of compliance tendencies, in line with the normative legitimacy framework. But in this study, there is a gap between normative legitimacy and institutional legitimacy as well. Perceptions of enforcement effectiveness are split and the policy goals are supported by youth. Lack of perceived access and inherent inconsistencies in actions on the ground can hinder confidence in institutional capacity to put policies into practice. From the perspective of Social Construction and Policy Design Theory, this case is an example of the fact that policy design cannot be done without enhancing implementation aspects and communication that is inclusive.

These implications for policy underscore the need to transform governance to more innovative digital forms of enforcement. With the addition of online sales channels in the current tobacco market making physical access control more challenging, implementing agencies must find ways to make cyber surveillance more effective to limit distribution of smoking products to youth. Furthermore, communication approaches need to be changed from stigmatizing to empowerment approaches. The social legitimacy of Act 852 can be reinforced by seeing youth as strategic partners in the public health, and not merely as objects of legal control, in order to achieve more natural and intrinsic compliance to the country's long-term objectives.

The policy recommendations of these results are straightforward. One is to focus on clear regulations and available official information channels for youth. Second, the enforcement of the laws and regulations should be consistently tightened over the physical premises and online, to minimize the difference between the legal and social realities. Third, policy interventions should not include narratives which may have a stigmatising effect on young people, but rather highlight shared responsibilities, such as the role of industry and supply chains. In general, this paper has shown that tobacco control policies are successful more than just because of the power of the law, but because the countries are able to create and sustain social legitimacy among young people. Support is important to provide a positive base, yet the effectiveness of policies over time is determined by consistency in execution, social construction of target groups, and perceptions of fairness. A solution that combines the normative and institutional aspects can have a long-term strengthening effect on the implementation of public health aspirations.

For future studies, it is suggested to further explore the qualitative aspects of youth scepticism towards the on-the-ground consistent enforcement with other qualitative

approaches. In addition to cross-sectional studies, a longitudinal study should be conducted to evaluate the impact of Act 852 on the long-term reduction of tobacco use and vaping, consistent with the national goal of decreasing the prevalence of tobacco smoking in the state, which is still alarmingly high.

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