

# Tobacco Denormalization and Industry Beliefs Among Smokers from Four Countries

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## Abstract

**Background:** Tobacco denormalization is an important concept for understanding smoking behavior. The present study sought to assess beliefs about the tobacco industry and the social acceptability of smoking among nationally representative samples of adult smokers from four countries, and to assess the relationship of these measures to cessation behavior and tobacco-control policy.

**Design:** A longitudinal survey of 9058 adult smokers from Canada ( $n = 2214$ ), the United States ( $n = 2138$ ), the United Kingdom ( $n = 2401$ ), and Australia ( $n = 2305$ ), was conducted in October–December 2002 and again in June and August 2003 (75% follow-up rate). The analyses were conducted in 2005.

**Results:** The findings indicate that few smokers perceive approval for their smoking, and most hold relatively antagonistic beliefs toward the tobacco industry. For example, 80% of smokers reported that society disapproves of smoking, and more than three quarters reported that tobacco companies cannot be trusted to tell the truth. Social and industry denormalization were independently associated with intentions to quit smoking. Baseline levels of social denormalization were associated with abstinence at the 8-month follow-up, as were changes in industry denormalization beliefs between baseline and follow-up. Anti-industry beliefs at baseline did not predict abstinence at follow-up. A similar pattern of findings was observed across all four countries. In addition, social denormalization and anti-industry beliefs were significantly associated with tobacco-control policies, such as noticing health warnings on packages and greater workplace smoking restrictions.

**Conclusions:** Tobacco denormalization constructs were independently linked to cessation-related outcomes among adults from four countries. Tobacco-industry denormalization themes in mass media campaigns may help to reduce tobacco use above and beyond more traditional communications that target social norms.

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