

Smoking-related knowledge and health risk beliefs in a national sample of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

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Abstract

OBJECTIVES: To describe general knowledge and perceived risk of the health consequences of smoking among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people; and to assess whether knowledge varies among smokers and whether higher knowledge and perceived risk are associated with quitting.

DESIGN, SETTING AND PARTICIPANTS: The Talking About The Smokes project used quota sampling to recruit participants from communities served by 34 Aboriginal community-controlled health services and one community in the Torres Strait. Baseline survey data were collected from 2522 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults from April 2012 to October 2013.

MAIN OUTCOME MEASURES: Knowledge of direct effects of smoking and harms of second-hand smoke (SHS), risk minimisation, health worry, and wanting and attempting to quit.

RESULTS: Most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants who were daily smokers demonstrated knowledge that smoking causes lung cancer (94%), heart disease (89%) and low birthweight (82%), but fewer were aware that it makes diabetes worse (68%). Similarly, almost all daily smokers knew of the harms of SHS: that it is dangerous to non-smokers (90%) and children (95%) and that it causes asthma in children (91%). Levels of knowledge among daily smokers were lower than among non-daily smokers, ex-smokers and never-smokers. Among smokers, greater knowledge of SHS harms was associated with health worry, wanting to quit and having attempted to quit in the past year, but knowledge of direct harms of smoking was not.

CONCLUSION: Lack of basic knowledge about the health consequences of smoking is not an important barrier to trying to quit for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander smokers. Framing new messages about the negative health effects of smoking in ways that encompass the health of others is likely to contribute to goal setting and prioritising quitting among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Recommended Citation

Nicholson, A.K., Borland, R., Couzos, S., Stevens, M., & Thomas, D.P. (2015). Smoking-related knowledge and health risk beliefs in a national sample of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. *Medical Journal of Australia*, 202 (10), 45-50.

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