The predictive utility of valuing the future for smoking cessation: Findings from the ITC Four Country Smoking and Vaping Surveys

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Abstract
Background: Delay discounting (DD) and time perspective (TP) are conceptually related constructs that are theorized as important determinants of the pursuit of future outcomes over present inclinations. This study explores their predictive relationships for smoking cessation.

Methods: 5006 daily smokers at a baseline wave provided 6710 paired observations of quitting activity between two waves. Data are from the International Tobacco Control (ITC) smoking and vaping surveys with samples from the USA, Canada, England, and Australia, across three waves conducted in 2016, 2018 and 2020. Smokers were assessed for TP and DD, plus smoking-specific predictors at one wave of cessation outcomes defined as either making a quit attempt and/or success among those who tried to quit which was ascertained at the subsequent survey wave.

Results: TP and DD were essentially uncorrelated. TP predicted making quit attempts, both on its own and controlling for other potential predictors but was negatively associated with quit success. By contrast, DD was not related to making quit attempts, but high DD predicted relapse. The presence of financial stress at baseline resulted in some moderation of effects.

Conclusions: Understanding the mechanisms of action of TP and DD can advance our understanding of, and ability to enhance, goal-directed behavioural change. TP appears to contribute to future intention formation, but not necessarily practical thought of how to achieve goals. DD is more likely an index of capacity to effectively generate competing future possibilities in response to immediate gratification.

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