

Knowledge about the relationship between smoking and blindness in Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia: results from the International Tobacco Control Four-Country Project

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Abstract

Purpose: Smoking is causally associated with certain prevalent visually impairing eye diseases, including age-related macular degeneration and cataract. Studies have found that people are afraid of “going blind” and may be motivated to quit smoking if they know that vision loss is associated with smoking behavior.

Methods: A random-digit dialed telephone survey was used to measure health knowledge of adult smokers in Canada (n=2,765), the United States (n=3,178), the United Kingdom (n=2,767), and Australia (n=2,623) as part of the International Tobacco Control Four-Country Project.

Results: A low proportion of smokers from Canada (13.0%), the United States (9.5%), and the United Kingdom (9.7%) believed that smoking can cause blindness. In contrast, 47.2% of Australian smokers believed that smoking causes blindness. Australia was the only country during the sampling period to have national awareness campaigns about smoking and its effects on eye health.

Conclusion: These findings point to the need across countries to educate the public on this important consequence of smoking. There is an opportunity for the public health and eye health communities to work to educate the public about the impacts smoking has on eye health to improve quit rates and help discourage people from starting to smoke.

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