

Malaysian and Thai smokers' beliefs about the harmfulness of 'light' and menthol cigarettes

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Abstract

Objective This study explored the extent to which Malaysian and Thai smokers believe "light" and menthol cigarettes are less harmful than "regular" cigarettes and the correlates of these beliefs.

Methods The study used data from wave 1 of the International Tobacco Control Southeast Asia Survey. 2006 adult smokers (95.3% male) from Malaysia and 2000 adult smokers (94.5% male) from Thailand were interviewed face to face in 2005.

Results 29% of Malaysian respondents reported currently smoking light cigarettes and 14% menthols, with 19% agreeing that lights are less harmful and 16% agreeing that menthols are less harmful. 38% of Thai respondents reported currently smoking light cigarettes and 19% menthols, with 46% agreeing that lights are less harmful and 35% agreeing that menthols are less harmful. Malaysian smokers reporting current use of light or menthol cigarettes were more likely to believe that they are less harmful. Reported use of lights did not relate to beliefs for Thai respondents. The belief that light and/or menthol cigarettes are less harmful was strongly related to the belief that they have smoother smoke.

Conclusions The experience of smoother smoke is likely to produce some level of belief in reduced harm, regardless of how brands are labelled and whether or not Federal Trade Commission FTC/International Organisation for Standardisation tar, nicotine and carbon monoxide yield figures are used

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