

Differences in quit attempts and cigarette smoking abstinence between Whites and African Americans in the United States: Literature review and results from the ITC United States Survey

Kulak, J., Cornelius, M.E., Fong, G.T., & Giovino, G.A.

Abstract

Introduction: While cigarette smoking prevalence is declining among US adults, quit rates may differ between white and African American smokers. Here, we summarize the literature on smoking cessation behaviors in whites and African Americans across four study designs and report the findings of new analyses of International Tobacco Control (ITC) US Survey cohort data.

Methods: We reviewed 32 publications containing 39 relevant analyses that compared quit attempts and abstinence between US whites and African Americans. Two additional longitudinal analyses were conducted on 821 white and 76 African American cigarette smokers from Waves 7 and 8 of the ITC US Survey (mean follow-up = 19 months).

Results: Of 17 total analyses of quit attempts, nine (including the ITC US Survey) observed that African American smokers were more likely than whites to attempt to quit during a given year; seven found no differences. Whites were more likely than African Americans to be abstinent in five of six retrospective cohort analyses and in two of five considered community- and population-based cohort studies. Four of these 11 analyses, including one from the ITC US Survey, found no differences.

Conclusions: Of 11 population- or community-based analyses, all seven that found significant differences indicated that whites were more likely to quit than African Americans. These findings, combined with the similar results from population-based birth cohort analyses, support the conclusion that white smokers are more likely to quit than African American smokers. Efforts to encourage and support quitting among all tobacco users remain a priority.

Implications: This article provides a review of the literature on smoking cessation among African American and white smokers, and adds new analyses that compare quit attempts and abstinence between US African Americans and whites. Results demonstrate a clear distinction between the findings of cross-sectional and retrospective cohort studies with those of cohort studies. Reasons for these differences merit further study.

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