

The role of social norms and socioeconomic status in smoking-related stigma among smokers in Mexico and Uruguay

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Abstract

Policies that promote the social unacceptability of smoking may also result in smoking-related stigma. The aim of this study is to evaluate how norms against smoking and socioeconomic status (SES) are associated with stigma among smokers. We used data from a panel of adult smokers who participated in the 2008–2012 administrations of the International Tobacco Control Policy Evaluation Survey in Mexico (n = 6670 observations) and Uruguay (n = 3296 observations). Generalized estimating equations were used to account for correlations in the outcomes over time within individuals. We evaluated if injunctive smoking norms (i.e. significant other norms and societal norms), descriptive smoking norms (i.e. number of smoking friends), and two markers of SES (i.e. education and income) were associated with different aspects of smoking-related stigma (i.e. feeling uncomfortable, negative stereotype of smokers, and perceived marginalization). We found that stronger anti-smoking injunctive norms were associated with higher levels of all indicators of perceived stigma in Mexico and Uruguay. Having fewer smoking friends was associated with feeling uncomfortable and perceived marginalization in Mexico. Higher income and education were associated with a stronger negative stereotype of smokers in Mexico. Lower income and education were associated with a stronger negative stereotype of smokers in Uruguay. Study results suggest that factors that drive the social unacceptability of tobacco may stigmatize smokers, although further research is needed to determine whether policy-promoted stigmatization produces undesirable outcomes (e.g. lower cessation rates).

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