

Social acceptability and desirability of smoking in a national sample of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

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Abstract

Objectives: To describe social normative beliefs about smoking in a national sample of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and to assess the relationship of these beliefs with quitting.

Design, setting and participants: The Talking About The Smokes project used a quota sampling design to recruit participants from communities served by 34 Aboriginal community-controlled health services and one community in the Torres Strait. We surveyed 1392 daily smokers, 251 nondaily smokers, 311 ex-smokers and 568 never-smokers from April 2012 to October 2013.

Main outcome measures: Eight normative beliefs about smoking; wanting and attempting to quit.

Results: Compared with daily smokers in the general Australian population, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander daily smokers were less likely to report that mainstream society disapproves of smoking (78.5% v 62%). Among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander daily smokers, 40% agreed that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community leaders where they live disapprove of smoking, 70% said there are increasingly fewer places they feel comfortable smoking, and most (90%) believed non-smokers set a good example to children. Support for the government to do more to tackle the harm caused by smoking was much higher than in the general Australian population (80% v 47.2%). These five normative beliefs were all associated with wanting to quit. Non-smokers reported low levels of pressure to take up smoking.

Conclusion: Tobacco control strategies that involve the leadership and participation of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community leaders, particularly strategies that emphasise protection of others, may be an important means of reinforcing beliefs that smoking is socially unacceptable, thus boosting motivation to quit.

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