

Smokers' beliefs about the relative safety of other tobacco products: Findings from the ITC Collaboration

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Abstract

Most tobacco control efforts in western countries focus on the factory-made, mass-produced (FM) cigarette, whereas other tobacco products receive relatively little attention. Noncombusted tobacco products (i.e., referred to as smokeless tobacco), particularly Swedish-style snus, carry lower disease risks, compared with combusted tobacco products such as cigarettes. In this context, it is important to know what tobacco users believe about the relative harmfulness of various types of tobacco products. Data for this study came from random-digit-dialed telephone surveys of current smokers aged 18 or older in Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Three waves of data, totaling 13,322 individuals, were assessed. Items assessed use of and beliefs about the relative harms of cigars, pipes, smokeless tobacco, and FM and roll-your-own cigarettes, as well as sociodemographics and smoking behaviors. Cigars (2.8%–12.7%) were the other tobacco products most commonly used by current cigarette smokers, followed by pipes (0.3%–2.1%) and smokeless tobacco (0.0%–2.3%). A significant minority of smokers (12%–21%) used roll-your-own cigarettes at least some of the time. About one quarter of smokers believed that pipes, cigars, or roll-your-own cigarettes were safer than FM cigarettes, whereas only about 13% responded correctly that smokeless tobacco was less hazardous than cigarettes. Multivariate analyses showed that use of other tobacco products was most strongly related to beliefs about the reduced harm of these other products. Use of other tobacco products was low but may be growing among smokers in the four countries studied. Smokers are confused about the relative harms of tobacco products. Health education efforts are needed to correct smoker misperceptions.

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