

Knowledge of health effects and intentions to quit among smokers in India: Findings from the Tobacco Control Policy (TCP) India pilot survey

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Abstract

Awareness of the health risks of smoking is an important factor in predicting smoking-related behaviour; however, little is known about the knowledge of health risks in low-income countries such as India. The present study examined beliefs about the harms of smoking and the impact of health knowledge on intentions to quit among a sample of 249 current smokers in both urban and rural areas in two states (Maharashtra and Bihar) from the 2006 TCP India Pilot Survey, conducted by the ITC Project. The overall awareness among smokers in India of the specific health risks of smoking was very low compared to other ITC countries, and only 10% of respondents reported that they had plans to quit in the next six months. In addition, smokers with higher knowledge were significantly more likely to have plans to quit smoking. For example, 26.2% of respondents who believed that smoking cause CHD and only 5.5% who did not believe that smoking causes CHD had intentions to quit ($\chi^2 = 16.348, p < 0.001$). Important differences were also found according to socioeconomic factors and state: higher levels of knowledge were found in Maharashtra than in Bihar, in urban compared to rural areas, among males, and among smokers with higher education. These findings highlight the need to increase awareness about the health risks of smoking in India, particularly in rural areas, where levels of education and health knowledge are lower.

Keywords: health risks; smoking; health knowledge; quit intentions; India

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