

Effectiveness of antismoking media messages and education among adolescents in Malaysia and Thailand: Findings from the International Tobacco Control Southeast Asia (ITC-SEA) Project

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Abstract

Introduction: Finding ways to discourage adolescents from taking up smoking is important because those who begin smoking at an earlier age are more likely to become addicted and have greater difficulty in quitting. This article examined whether anti smoking messages and education could help to reduce smoking susceptibility among adolescents in two Southeast Asian countries and to explore the possible moderating effect of country and gender.

Methods: Data came from Wave 1 of the International Tobacco Control Southeast Asia Project (ITC-SEA) survey conducted in Malaysia (n = 1,008) and Thailand (n = 1,000) where adolescents were asked about receiving antismoking advice from nurses or doctors, being taught at schools about the danger of smoking, noticing antismoking messages, knowledge of health effects of smoking, beliefs about the health risks of smoking, smoking susceptibility, and demographic information. Data were analyzed using chi-square tests and logistic regression models.

Results: Overall, significantly more Thai adolescents reported receiving advice from their nurses or doctors about the danger of smoking ($p < .001$), but no country difference was observed for reported antismoking education in schools and exposure to antismoking messages. Multivariate analyses revealed that only provision of antismoking education at schools was significantly associated with reduced susceptibility to smoking among female Malaysian adolescents (OR = 0.26). Higher knowledge of smoking harm and higher perceived health risk of smoking were associated with reduced smoking susceptibility among Thai female (OR = 0.52) and Malaysian male adolescents (OR = 0.63), respectively.

Conclusions: Educating adolescents about the dangers of smoking in schools appears to be the most effective means of reducing adolescents' smoking susceptibility in both countries, although different prevention strategies may be necessary to ensure effectiveness for male and female adolescents.

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