Māori Smokers Support Major Tobacco Control Interventions: National Survey Data from Aotearoa/New Zealand

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Background

Māori are the indigenous population of Aotearoa/ New Zealand (NZ) and have high prevalences of smoking compared to non-Māori. As a result, Māori suffer from a range of smoking-related diseases at disproportionately high rates (compared to non-Māori). The health, social, cultural and economic burden from smoking has prompted discussion among Māori health workers to advocate for new and radical (endgame) measures in tobacco control [1]. It has also stimulated an Inquiry into tobacco issues by a government Select Committee (recently commenced). Here we describe the attitudes of Māori smokers to a range of tobacco control policy options.

Methods

The NZ arm of the International Tobacco Control Policy Evaluation Project (ITC Project) uses as its sampling frame the NZ Health Survey (a representative national sample with boosted sampling of Māori). From this sample we surveyed adult smokers (n=1376) including 607 Māori respondents in Wave 1 (Wave 2 included 369 Māori). Further details of the methods (including response rates, attrition and weighting processes) are available in online reports [2]. In the analysis presented here we exclude Pacific Peoples (from other South Pacific islands) from the comparison group of “European/ Other” but this comparison group did include people who identified as Asian. All results are for Wave 1 (unless otherwise stated) and were weighted and adjusted for the complex sample design to represent the national population of all Māori (and non-Māori) smokers in NZ.

Results

There was majority support among Māori smokers for key tobacco control interventions (Figure 1). Support was statistically significantly greater than the European/Other ethnic group for: wanting more government action (crude odds ratio (OR) = 1.60, 95% CI: 1.20 – 2.15) and for more regulation of tobacco companies (in a fully adjusted multivariate model the adjusted OR was 1.58, 95% CI: 1.08 – 2.32). There was majority support for higher tobacco tax (if the revenue is used for quitting support) but only minority support for a ban on cigarette sales in 10 years time (with both these being higher in Māori compared to European/Other but not at statistically significant levels in the multivariate analyses).

Majority support by Māori smokers was also voiced for:

**New product laws**: That is for laws covering: reducing the toxins in cigarette smoke (84.8%), reducing the addictiveness of cigarettes (84.4%), and for factory-made cigarettes to be fire-safe (75.8%).

**Marketing and supply controls**: Banning all promotion of cigarettes by tobacco companies (84.7%), complete bans on displays of cigarettes inside shops and stores (62.5%), and limiting tobacco sales to special places where children are not allowed to go (66.6%).

**New smokefree areas**: That is only a minority agreed that smoking should be allowed in playgrounds (29.3%), within 5 meters of the entrance to public buildings (44.8%), and in cars with children inside (3.4%).

For these interventions Māori usually had higher levels of support than non-Māori but not at statistically significant levels. In contrast to the above list, only minority support was voiced for tobacco companies being required to sell cigarettes in plain packages (42.3%). Further details have now been published on many of these results [3], and some similar results have been found in another national NZ survey (of both smokers and non-smokers) with boosted sampling of Māori [4].

Acknowledgements

The ITC Project New Zealand team thank the survey respondents for their help; the Health Research Council of NZ which has provided the core funding for this Project; and our other project partners (see: http://www.wnmeds.ac.nz/itcproject.html).

References