Assessment of Awareness on the Health Risks of Cigarette Smoking Among Mekelle University Students, Mekelle, Ethiopia

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Background: Cigarette smoking is the largest preventable risk factor for morbidity and mortality in developed countries. Current smoking in the United States is positively associated with younger age, lower income, reduced educational achievement, and disadvantaged neighborhood environment. This study assessed smokers' awareness about the health risks of cigarette smoking and the benefits of smoking filtered and low-tar cigarettes, and their awareness of and interest in trying reduced-risk tobacco products.

Methodology: A cross sectional study design was employed among 1093 Mekelle University students from January, 2017 to August, 2017. Simple random sampling method was used to select study subjects from each batch proportionally. Data was collected using self-administered questionnaire and analyzed using SPSS and Epi Info software packages. In addition, respondents were asked about their interest in and perceived ability to stop smoking and about their desire for more information about the health risks of smoking.

Results: 65% of the smokers were least knowledgeable about low-tar and filter cigarettes and 55.4% were knowledgeable about the health risks of smoking. The smokers' characteristics most commonly associated with misinformation when those aged 25 years or older, smokers of ultralight cigarettes, smokers who believe they will stop smoking before they experience a serious health problem caused by smoking, smokers who have never used a stop-smoking medication, and smokers with a lower education level. Those who believed they would stop smoking in the next year were more knowledgeable about smoking. Some 77% of respondents reported a desire for additional information from tobacco companies on the health dangers of smoking.

Conclusion: The present findings demonstrate that smokers are misinformed about many aspects of the cigarettes they smoke and stop-smoking medications and that they want more information about ways to reduce their health risks.

Keywords: Smoking, Cigarette, Addiction, Tobacco.

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