

Effectiveness of pictorial health warning on cigarette packages: A cross-sectional study in Sarawak, Malaysia

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Abstract

Introduction: Specific health warning placed on the tobacco product packages is considered as an effective and low-cost method for increasing the knowledge and awareness among the community. Thus, a study was conducted to assess the perception of pictorial health warnings (PHWs) against smoking among the adult rural population of Sarawak.

Methods: Cross-sectional data were collected from 10 villages in Kota Samarahan and Kuching Division by face to face interview using modified Global Adult Tobacco Survey questionnaire. Non-probability sampling method was adopted to select the villages. All the households of the selected villages were visited and an adult member was selected randomly from each house irrespective of the sex. After missing value imputation, 1000 data were analysed using statistical software IBM SPSS 20.0 version.

Results: Analysis showed that 28.8% of the respondents were current smokers, 7.8% were past smokers and the rest were non-smokers. Six items of pictorial health warnings were evaluated with five point Likert's scales for attractiveness, fearfulness and adequacy of the information. Analysis revealed that the majority of the respondents had perceived awareness on PHWs, but the smokers believed that this was not adequate to make them quit smoking. Only one-fifth (19.7%) of them reported that current pictorial health warnings were sufficient to motivate people to quit smoking.

Conclusion: Though the PHWs on cigarette packages are appealing, it is not sufficient as a reason to stop smoking. Thus, an approach using an integrated anti-tobacco public health programme should be focused into the specific targeted community.

Introduction

Tobacco smoking epidemic is one of the biggest public health threats all over the world. Nearly 6 million people die each year due to tobacco-related diseases. More than 5 million of those deaths are the result of direct tobacco use while more than 600,000 are the result of non-smokers being exposed to second-hand smoke. Approximately one person dies every 6 seconds due to tobacco accounting for one in 10 adult deaths.¹ Nearly 80% of the more than 1 billion smokers worldwide live in low- and middle-income countries, where the burden of tobacco-related illnesses and death is heaviest.² The burden of smoking is partly due to the aggressive marketing strategies of multinational tobacco companies.³ The World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC), the world first public health

legal binding international treaty was ratified on 27 February 2005 to counter the problem of "globalisation of the tobacco epidemic." It is an evidence-based treaty that reaffirms the right of all people to the highest standard of health. The main objective of the framework is "to protect present and future generations from the devastating health, social, environmental and economic consequences of tobacco consumption and exposure to tobacco smoke." This framework was ratified by 168 countries and consisted of certain standards that signatory countries are encouraged to implement.⁴ Malaysia is among the signatory countries of WHO FCTC and has been taking several measures against smoking. This included the enactment of the Control of Tobacco Product (Amendment) Regulation in 2008, whereby effective from 1 January 2009, every cigarette pack sold in Malaysia is required to be printed with Pictorial Health Warnings