Smoker misperceptions around tobacco: National survey data of particular relevance to protecting Maori health


Abstract
To evaluate relevant issues around smoker knowledge and misperceptions about tobacco smoking, a cohort group of 1376 New Zealand smoking adults aged >18 years and 607 Maori respondents were surveyed between March 2007 and February 2008. Specific questions relevant to possible misinformation included perceptions related to light/mild cigarettes/tobacco, to menthols, and to RYO tobacco. Overall results indicated that sizeable minorities of both Maori and European/other smokers had various misperceptions about tobacco products. Regarding light and mild cigarettes, nearly half (48%) of Maori smokers have at least one of three misperceptions which suggest (erroneously) that these cigarettes have health benefits compared to “regular” cigarettes. Also, New Zealand smokers have misperceptions about mentholated cigarettes (“menthols”) being less harmful relative to “non-mentholated” cigarettes. This misperception was significantly more common (13% vs 7%) among Maori smokers. In addition, a minority (up to 10%) of Maori smokers also have specific misperceptions about the adverse health effects of second-hand smoke. Around a fifth of Maori and European/other smokers gave health reasons for smoking RYO cigarettes. Smokers also have high levels of knowledge deficits and misperceptions around smokeless tobacco products. Finally, a substantial group of smokers agree or strongly agree that “tobacco companies have done everything they can to reduce the harm caused by smoking,” and Maori smokers were significantly more likely to have this view (24%) compared to 18% of European/other. In conclusion, these data on smoker misperceptions are likely to be associated with tobacco industry messages on packaging.

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