Depression and Smoking Among Youth in Thailand and Malaysia: Findings from the ITC Southeast Asia Survey

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International Tobacco Control Policy Evaluation Project

Background

- Approximately 500 million of the world's 1.3 billion smokers live in Asia (Mackay & Erikson, 2002).
- The tobacco industry is targeting developing countries. It is therefore important to understand what factors influence adolescent smoking initiation in these countries to prevent smoking uptake.
- The majority of studies examining factors influencing smoking initiation have been conducted among Western populations. Yet the culture, norms, and tobacco control policies are very different in Southeast Asia.
- Depression has been identified as a major factor associated with smoking among youth in Western populations.

Research Question

Is depression associated with smoking among youth in Thailand? In Malaysia?

ITC Southeast Asia Survey

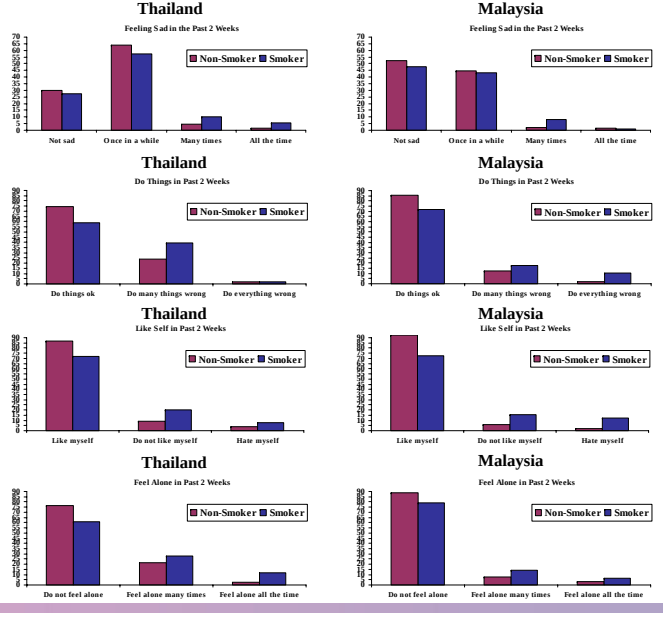
- A nationally representative face-to-face survey of 2,005 adolescents (13- 17 years old) in Thailand and Malaysia. Respondents were recruited using a stratified multi-stage sampling design. Data reported are from the baseline wave (Jan-March 2005).

Sample

Country	Smokers (occasional or current)	Non-Smokers
Thailand	161	833
Malaysia	145	848

Results

Depression Item and Smoking Status



Results

- Depression items were standardized and the averages were combined to form a single measure of depression.
- Conducted a weighted logistic regression analysis predicting smoking status (smoker vs. non-smoker) by depression score (controlling for age, gender, and number of friends that smoke).
- Adolescents with higher depression scores were more likely to be smokers:
  Thailand $p<0.008$, OR=1.60 (1.14-2.25) (N=987)
  Malaysia $p=0.01$, OR=1.99 (1.17-3.39) (N=949)
- There was no significant interaction between gender and depression predicting smoking status:
  Thailand $p=0.10$ (N=987)
  Malaysia $p=0.34$ (N=949)

Conclusions

- This was the first nationally representative study of youth in Thailand and Malaysia to examine the association between depression and smoking.
- Consistent with previous research in Western societies, depression is associated with smoking among adolescents in Thailand and Malaysia.
- Programs aimed at depressed youth may help prevent smoking or aid cessation.
- Future research will use longitudinal data to determine the direction of the relation (i.e. Does smoking cause depression in youth or are depressed youth more likely to start smoking?)

ITC Participating Institutions

ITC Project Research Support