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Community Interventions: Strengthening Health Literacy on Tobacco-related Matters

A tobacco control programme requires a multipronged strategy. Increasing the knowledge and awareness about its harmful effects is one of the ways of reducing tobacco use among people. Available global evidence on the impact of community health education interventions with regard to tobacco use is summarized here.

Global evidence

A well-designed public education campaign that is integrated with community- and school-based programmes, strong enforcement efforts and help for smokers who want to quit, can successfully counter marketing by the tobacco industry. Such integrated programmes have been demonstrated to lower smoking among young people by as much as 40%.¹⁵⁶

A 15-year follow-up study, as part of the North Karelia Youth Project, showed that the reduction in tobacco use as a result of a mass media intervention combined with a school- and community-based education programme, lasts over time. In this study, students were taught about social pressures to smoke exerted by peers, adults and the mass media, and were trained by demonstration and role play to deal with them. The short- and long-term effects of smoking were also discussed. The mean lifetime cigarette consumption was 22% lower among subjects who had been in the programme than among control subjects.¹⁵⁷

A study done in Minnesota found that a five-year intervention involving a media campaign, community programmes and school-based instruction resulted in significantly lower smoking rates. At the end of high school, just 14.6% of students in the intervention community were weekly smokers, compared to 24.1% of those in the control community.¹⁵⁸

A study conducted in 1997 found that, in terms of cost per years of life gained, education campaigns through the mass media were among the most cost-effective methods to prevent or reduce tobacco use.¹⁵⁹

An effective model for community-based programmes is the American Stop Smoking Intervention Study (ASSIST). The primary goal of this federally funded community-based programme was to reduce the prevalence of smoking and cigarette consumption among adults and youth in the 17 states participating in the study. By working with community groups, youth groups and adult organizations, the ASSIST programme has been able to reach diverse populations and raise public awareness regarding the need for tobacco control policies. Outreach programmes in health care settings and training programmes for physicians, nurses, dentists and dental hygienists also increase the potential public exposure to the dangers of tobacco and benefits of quitting smoking or avoiding starting altogether. Within three years of full funding of the project, per capita tobacco consumption in the ASSIST states was 7% lower than in non-ASSIST states. More than three-quarters of the intervention states showed some decrease in cigarette consumption despite decreases in the price of cigarettes.¹⁶⁰

The state of Oregon in the USA has achieved impressive declines in per capita consumption after implementing a statewide tobacco control programme. Oregon's community activities include, among others, engaging young people to plan and conduct community tobacco prevention and education events and campaigns, working with judges and retailers to develop

education and diversion programmes, conducting a campaign on smoking in the home, and developing educational presentations and strengthening tobacco-use policies in schools, community and day-care centres.¹⁶¹

A 1995 study of California's anti-smoking programme found that anti-smoking media campaigns are an effective way of reducing cigarette consumption, and noted that higher funding levels produced more powerful results.¹⁵⁶

A three-month multimedia anti-smoking campaign conducted in Norway (1977) is credited with reducing tobacco sales by 4% and encouraging an estimated 100,000 Norwegian smokers to attempt to stop smoking.¹⁶²

A two-year anti-smoking television and radio campaign conducted in Greece between 1978 and 1980 is credited with reducing tobacco sales and increasing the number of smokers attempting to stop smoking. In the years before the campaign, the annual tobacco sales had increased at approximately 6% per year. During the campaign, tobacco sales were flat.¹⁶²

Evaluations of two of the longer running anti-tobacco campaigns in California and Massachusetts suggest that the counter-advertising components of their programmes had contributed to an overall reduction in cigarette use and greater public awareness of the hazards of tobacco.¹⁶²

School-based tobacco prevention programmes that identify the social influences which promote tobacco use among youth and teach skills to resist such influences can substantially reduce or delay adolescent smoking. Although long-term follow up of such programmes has indicated that the effect may dissipate over time, other studies have shown that the effectiveness of school-based tobacco prevention programmes is strengthened by booster sessions and communitywide programmes involving parents and community organizations and including school policies, the mass media and restrictions on youth access.¹⁶¹

Increasing excise taxes on cigarettes reduces tobacco consumption rates, but when the excise taxes support effective community, media and school programmes to prevent tobacco use, decreases in the per capita consumption will continue even if the industry lowers tobacco prices to pre-excise tax values.¹⁶³

Goldman and Glantz reviewed research on the effectiveness of various anti-smoking messages. They concluded that 'aggressive' public education campaigns that focus on 'industry manipulation' (that is, on the goal of the tobacco industry to recruit young smokers and the tactics used to achieve this goal) and the negative effects of second-hand smoke are more likely to reduce cigarette consumption and denormalize smoking.¹⁶⁴

Successful health interventions in India have been cited in Chapter 6.

Effective public education strategy

Available research and experience show that a public education campaign should include the following characteristics:^{156,161}

- It must incorporate paid media, public relations, and special events and promotions in a coordinated effort that is integrated with school- and community-based programmes, as well as the other elements of a comprehensive tobacco reduction plan.
- It must be well funded so that the media component can achieve the reach necessary to be effective. This effort must be sustained over the long term.
- The mass media should be used for dissemination of policies related to tobacco control. These messages help to reinforce community campaigns.
- There should be no restrictions on the content of the messages, and the campaign must operate completely independent of tobacco industry input.

- It must be grounded in rigorous, state-of-the-art research on effectiveness.
- Young people must be involved in the planning and conduct of community tobacco prevention and education events and campaigns.
- Educational presentations should be developed and tobacco-use policies should be strengthened in schools, the community and day-care centres.
- Campaigns should be conducted on stopping smoking in the home.
- Tobacco advertising should be assessed locally (at state level) and plans should be developed to reduce tobacco sponsorship of public events.
- Smoking cessation programmes should be offered.
- They should focus on information, attitudes, and skills to resist social and behavioural influences, as well as on peer norms, refusal skills, etc. among others.
- They should be socially and culturally acceptable to all communities. The lack of this has seen programmes failing to have the desired effect.¹⁶⁵
- Tobacco-related information should be included in the curriculum.
- There should be booster sessions, where the knowledge once imparted can be re-emphasized.
- The information should be imparted by the teacher rather than an outside health professional.
- Teachers should be adequately and regularly trained by health professionals.
- Students should be included in the dissemination of information to the community.
- Cessation support should be given to students and teachers.
- Parents, the community and media should be involved in these interventions.
- The programme should be regularly assessed.

School-based interventions

These should include the following.^{156,161}

- They should focus on information, attitudes,

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KEY MESSAGES

- Increasing the knowledge and awareness about the harmful effects of tobacco use among the people is one of the ways to reduce tobacco use.
- Health education leads to a long-lasting reduction in tobacco use, when it is imparted through the mass media and combined with a school- and community-based education programme.
- Education campaigns through the mass media are among the most cost-effective methods currently available to prevent or reduce tobacco use.
- School-based tobacco prevention programmes that identify the social influences which promote tobacco use among the youth and teach skills to resist such influences can significantly reduce or delay adolescent smoking, especially if strengthened by booster sessions and communitywide programmes involving parents and community organizations.
- Public education programmes should be well funded and based on rigorous research.
- The distinct cultural profiles of the targeted population groups should be kept in mind while designing programmes.