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Summary Report
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Canada

Cigarette use among native Canadian youth in Winnipeg

Cigarette use among native Canadian youth in Winnipeg, Manitoba

Twelve young researchers conducted a pilot enquiry into cigarette use among 12-24 years old Native people living in the inner city of Winnipeg, Manitoba. The field work was completed between September 29 and October 4, 1995. The survey was part of a project aimed at the development of appropriate materials and programmes to support First Nations' youth resistance to cigarette smoking or to help them quit.

A purposive sample was drawn from areas of known concentration of the target group. Clusters were stratified between school and non-school going youth; each of these was further sub-divided into traditional and non-traditional sites. Three instruments were used: an individual youth questionnaire (quantitative data), a focus group discussion for teenagers and a key informants' interview guide for personnel involved with the delivery of smoking-related programmes and materials to youth.

Some 622 youth participated; over half (56%) were daily smokers of an average of eight cigarettes; 75% of the youth smoked occasionally. The average age of uptake was 12 years. Two out of three respondents said they smoked cigarettes because they were addicted, and 77% of these wanted to quit. Factors having a protective role against smoking included:

ease in refusing a cigarette when offered: a youth with this characteristic is 14 times more likely to resist smoking compared with one who finds it hard to say 'no';

parental disapproval: a youth whose parents disapproved of young people smoking was five times more resistant to smoking than a youth whose parents approved of smoking;

behaviour of friends: a youth with few friends who smoked was three times (OR 3.3) more resistant to pressure to smoke than one with that many friends who smoked;

alcohol: not drinking alcohol provided a three fold protection against smoking;

self-esteem in relation to peer groups: if a youth did not feel left out from the group when others smoked, s/he was twice as resistant (OR 2.4) to smoking as one who felt excluded.

There was a general consensus in the focus group discussions that current programs were inadequate and did not reach teenagers. Proposals were formulated by the youth and corrective actions were identified by key informants. The increased use of peer-to-peer programs was highly recommended as a way to counter the pressure to smoke exercised by friends. In addition, the development of graphically explicit comic books was suggested as was that of CD ROM as ways of reaching out to teenagers. The role of parents and teachers was identified as key. The most important action in this regard was for parents and other adults to stop smoking and/or actively disapprove of it. The increase of public health education activities in schools was seen as essential. The information needs of the younger children were different and specific suggestions were made in this respect.

These results were presented by the teenage researchers to an audience of scientists and representatives of funding agencies called upon to meet specifically for this purpose at the Nechi Institute in Edmonton, Alberta. The presentation was well received and the teenagers planned to be repeating the same feedback process in their respective schools.

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