

The Importance of Religion in Smoking Behavior in Thailand and Malaysia: Findings from the ITC Southeast Asia Project

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We gratefully acknowledge funding provided from The US National Cancer Institute /NIH (From the Roswell Park Transdisciplinary Tobacco Use Research Cancer (TTURC) PSOCA111236. Results reported are from first wave results of the ITC Southeast Asia Surveys, a part of the International Tobacco Control Policy Evaluation Project (ITC Project).

Background

- *Religion as a researched social / cultural determinant of smoking behavior has been largely absent in western studies*
- *In developing, low and middle income countries, religion may play an important role in the “behavioral ecology” of smoking*
- *Our interest was in the degree to which religiosity plays a role in smoking beliefs and practices in Muslim Malaysia and Buddhist Thailand*
- *Both countries have had recent religious campaigns against smoking; Malaysia, on quitting during the holy month of Ramadan and Thailand, a smoke-free temple program. Some religious leaders in both countries have spoken out against smoking.*

Purpose of the Study

- *To investigate whether religious norms or importance of religious leadership differs as a function of religiosity*
- *To examine whether religious norms or religious leader's advice is related to past quitting or future intention to quit*
- *To examine if religiosity and locality seem to be moderators in the association between religious factors and quitting attitudes and behaviors*

Methods - ITC Southeast Asia Survey

Who : *A collaborative team of survey professionals from Mahidol University's Institute of Population Studies in Thailand and the Malaysian National Poison Centre at The University Sains Malaysia worked with local advisors and researchers of the International Tobacco Control Policy Evaluation Project to develop a tailored survey instrument for a face to face interview on tobacco use topics.*

What : *A survey of 2,000 adult smokers in each country was conducted in early 2005 and respondents were sampled from selected households using a multi-stage cluster sampling design. The survey included some common and also country-specific questions about religious attitudes and leadership on smoking.*

How : *The survey data was cleaned and carefully checked by data analysts and then descriptive and analytical statistical tests performed using SPSS to compare associated and mediating factors of religiosity.*

Results (1) – Does religious norms or importance of religious leadership differ as a function of religiosity?

Religiosity was determined by the degree to which individuals stated that their religious beliefs affect their actions. Those stating that their religious beliefs affect their actions all the time were considered to show high religiosity.

Some 58% of Malaysian Muslims versus 24% of Thai Buddhists said their religious beliefs affected their action all the time. More Thai Buddhists said their religion discourages smoking (87 vs 80%). Conversely, more Malaysian Muslims said they would quit smoking if their religious leader said to do so (63 vs 56%) and that their religious leader would influence them a lot to quit (28 vs 25%).

In short, though religiosity differed a lot, general religious norms and feelings about religious leadership did not vary much in the two countries.

Result (2)

To examine whether religious norms or religious leader's advice is related to past quitting or future intention to quit. We examined whether religious norms or leaders had an effect on a recent quit attempt or future interest in quitting. Religiosity was stronger in rural Thai Buddhist and in urban Malaysian Muslims. There were strikingly significant odds ratios for recent quit attempts and future plans to quit based on religious factors for Malaysian Muslim's, but much less so Thai Buddhists. See comparison on common survey factors below:

Positive Results - Malaysian Muslims Except Where Indicated

	<i>OR * Recent Quit Attempt</i>	<i>OR * Future Plan to Quit</i>
<i>1. Belief Guide Actions (All the Time)</i>	<i>+ 2.41 (1.12-5.23)</i>	<i>+ 2.32 (1.17-4.60)</i>
<i>2. Religion discourages Smoking</i>	<i>+ 4.50 (1.67-12.08)</i>	<i>N.S.</i>
<i>3. Religion leader Said to Quit</i>	<i>N.S.</i>	<i>+ 1.81(1.22-2.57)</i>
<i>4. Religion leader Would Motivate Quitting (A lot)</i>	<i>✓ Thai 1.86 (1.36-2.53)</i>	<i>+3.16 (1.67-5.99) 3.34 (2.42-4.59) ✓ Thai</i>

✓ Only category with significant OR For Thai

** All 95% CI*

Three additional Malaysian Muslim questions also significant

OR = 3.71 (1.11-12.45) Smoking considered a forbidden ruling and recent quit attempt

OR = 3.38 (1.58-7.25) Ramadan motivates recent quit attempt

OR = 2.80(1.41-5.58) Ramadan motivates future plan to quit.

Results-(3)

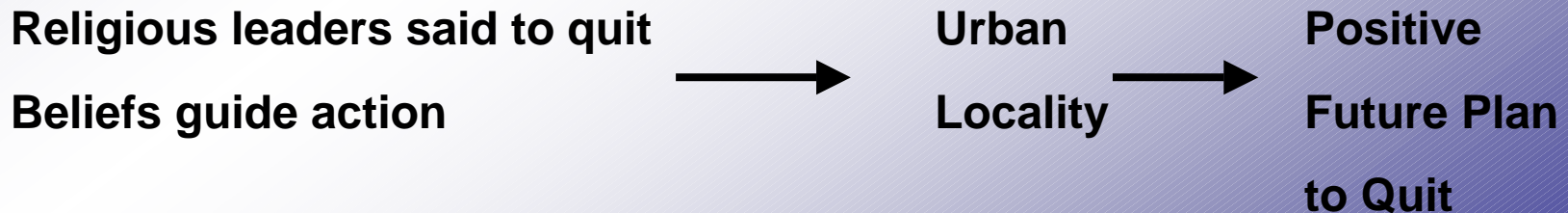
Are religiosity or locality moderators in the association of religious factors with recent quit attempts or future plan to smoke?

For Muslims locality was a moderator for religion discourages smoking and Islamic ruling on smoking for recent quit attempt.

<u>Religion discourages smoking</u>	} (Locality) }	<u>Recent quit attempt</u>
<u>Islamic (Forbidden) ruling on smoking</u>		Rural -
		Urban +

For Thais, neither locality nor religiosity was a moderator.

Urban locality for Muslims increased the effect of several factors on future plan to quit:



Conclusion

Though initiatives by religious leaders and followers in both countries show promise, these results show that religion appears to be a more important vehicle for encouraging Malaysian Muslims to quit smoking than for Thai Buddhists.

Subsequent waves of the ITC-Southeast Asia Survey will show the level of recognition and effect of new religious initiatives to contribute to smoking cessation through commitment and motivators.