



Rationalization and Regret among Smokers in Thailand and Malaysia: Findings from the ITC Southeast Asia Survey

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Why Do We Care about Smoking?

- ◆ Smoking is the cause of one in five cancer deaths
- ◆ Globally, 1.1 billion are current smokers
- ◆ 10 million deaths each year by 2020
- ◆ 70% of these deaths will happen in developing countries

Smokers' Cognitive Dissonance

- ◆ The 1964 U.S. Surgeon General's report linked smoking and lung cancer
- ◆ Discrepancy between smokers' behaviour and their desire to quit
 - 80% of smokers want to quit
 - 3-5% of smokers quit successfully
- ◆ This discrepancy induces smokers to experience cognitive dissonance

Rationalization of Smoking

- ◆ Smokers adopt rationalization to reduce cognitive dissonance by
 - Underestimating the danger of smoking
 - Holding unrealistically optimistic thoughts about their chances of avoiding illness, etc. etc.
- ◆ Rationalization is related to not planning to quit and fewer quit attempts

Regret: Psychological Models

- ◆ Regret: A negative, cognitive-based emotion that we experience when realizing or imagining that our current situation could be better if we had acted differently
- ◆ Regret affects decision-making

Regret among Smokers

- ◆ 85% of adult smokers in the United States are regretful (Slovic, 2001)
- ◆ 90% of smokers in four English-speaking countries are regretful (Fong et al., 2004)
- ◆ Regret is positively related to intentions to quit
- ◆ Anticipated regret predicts intentions to avoid smoking

Rationalization and Regret

- ◆ Smokers experience inconsistent cognitions, dissonance is created
- ◆ Smokers are motivated to reduce dissonance by rationalizing their smoking
- ◆ When smokers fail to rationalize, they may experience regret
- ◆ Rationalization is negatively related to, whereas regret is positively related to quit intentions

Smoking in Thailand and Malaysia

	Thailand	Malaysia
Smoking Prevalence	1981: 63.2% of males 5.4% of females 2000: 42.9% of males 2.4% of females	1986: 41.0% of males 4.0% of females 1996: 49.2% of males 3.2% of females
Tobacco Industry	Thailand Tobacco Monopoly (TTM) with the Ministry of Finance holding an 85% stake	BAT, Philip Morris, Japan Tobacco
Tobacco Control	Strong: Tobacco Product Act, Non Smoker's Health Protection Act	Weak: Attractive Commercial environment to multinational tobacco companies

Culture in Thailand and Malaysia

Similarity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Collectivistic cultures- Group harmony is more important than individual freedom and independence	
	Thailand	Malaysia
Differences	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- More collectivistic- More traditional country: Family is the core unit	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Less collectivistic- More westernized country

Social Norms, Culture and Psychological Experiences

Policies

Thailand has longer and stronger tobacco control policies than Malaysia



Social Norms

Social norms against smoking are expected to be stronger in Thailand than Malaysia

Culture

Being more traditionally collectivistic, family's negative attitudes toward smoking are more important for Thai smokers than Malaysian smokers

Psychological Experiences

Thai smokers may be less likely to rationalize and more likely to regret than Malaysian smokers

The International Tobacco Control (ITC) Policy Evaluation Southeast Asia Survey

- ◆ Representative national sample
- ◆ Multistage cluster sampling
- ◆ 40 minute in-person survey (Jan-Mar 2005)
- ◆ Participants
 - 4,006 adult smokers (≥ 18 years) in Malaysia (N=2006) and Thailand (N=2000)
 - Smoked at least 100 cigarettes lifetime and who currently smoke at least weekly

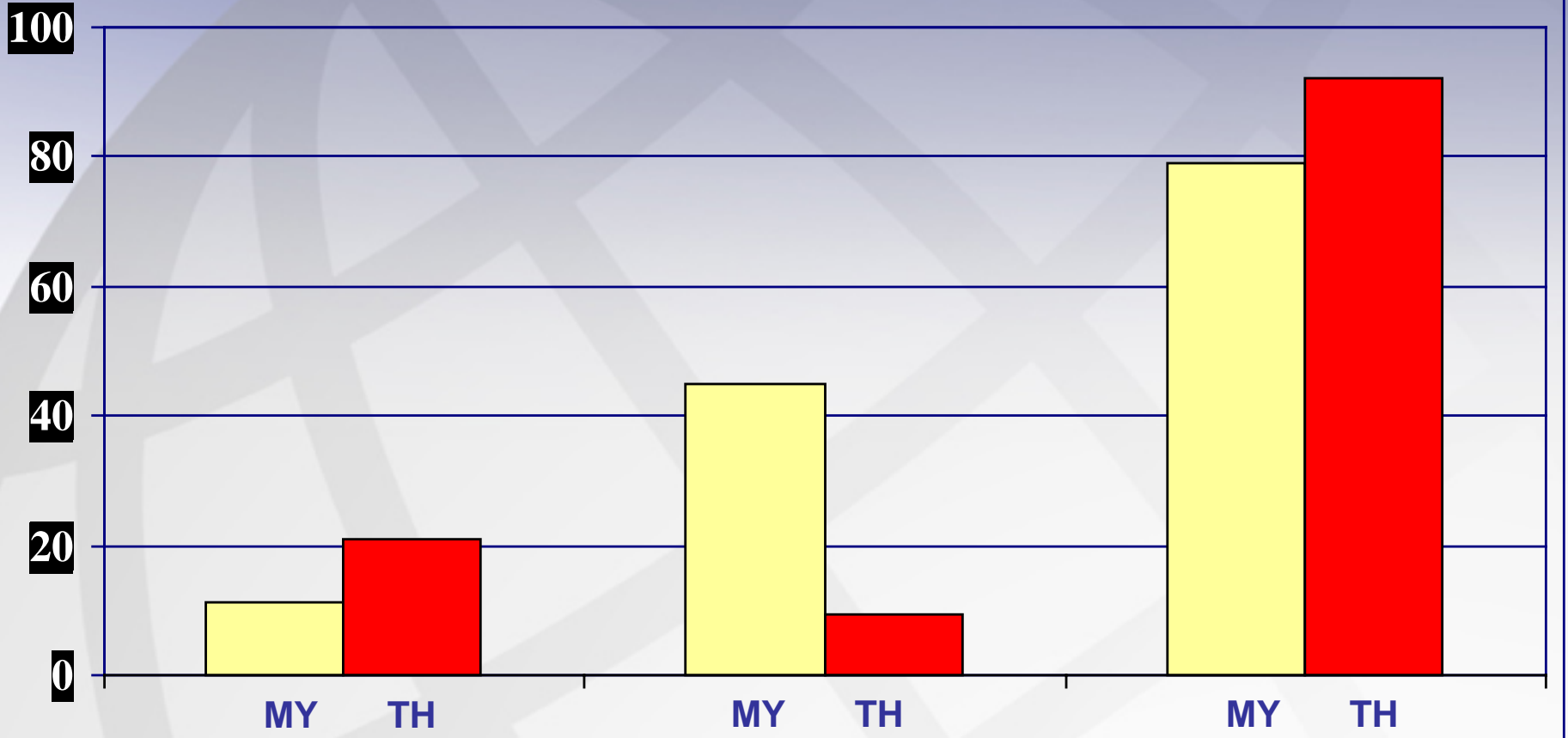
Key Measures

- ◆ **Rationalization:** “You’ve got to die of something, so why not enjoy yourself and smoke.”
- ◆ **Regret:** “If you had to do it over again, you would not have started smoking.”
- ◆ **Quit intentions:** “Are you planning to quit smoking within the next month, within the next six months, sometime in the future, or not planning to quit?”
- ◆ **Social norms:**
 - “Malaysian [*or* Thai] society disapproves of smoking.” (Society norm)
 - “People who are important to you believe that you should not smoke.” (People norm)
- ◆ **Vertical collectivism:** “You would give up an activity you really enjoy if your family did not approve.”

Quit Intentions

Rationalization

Regret

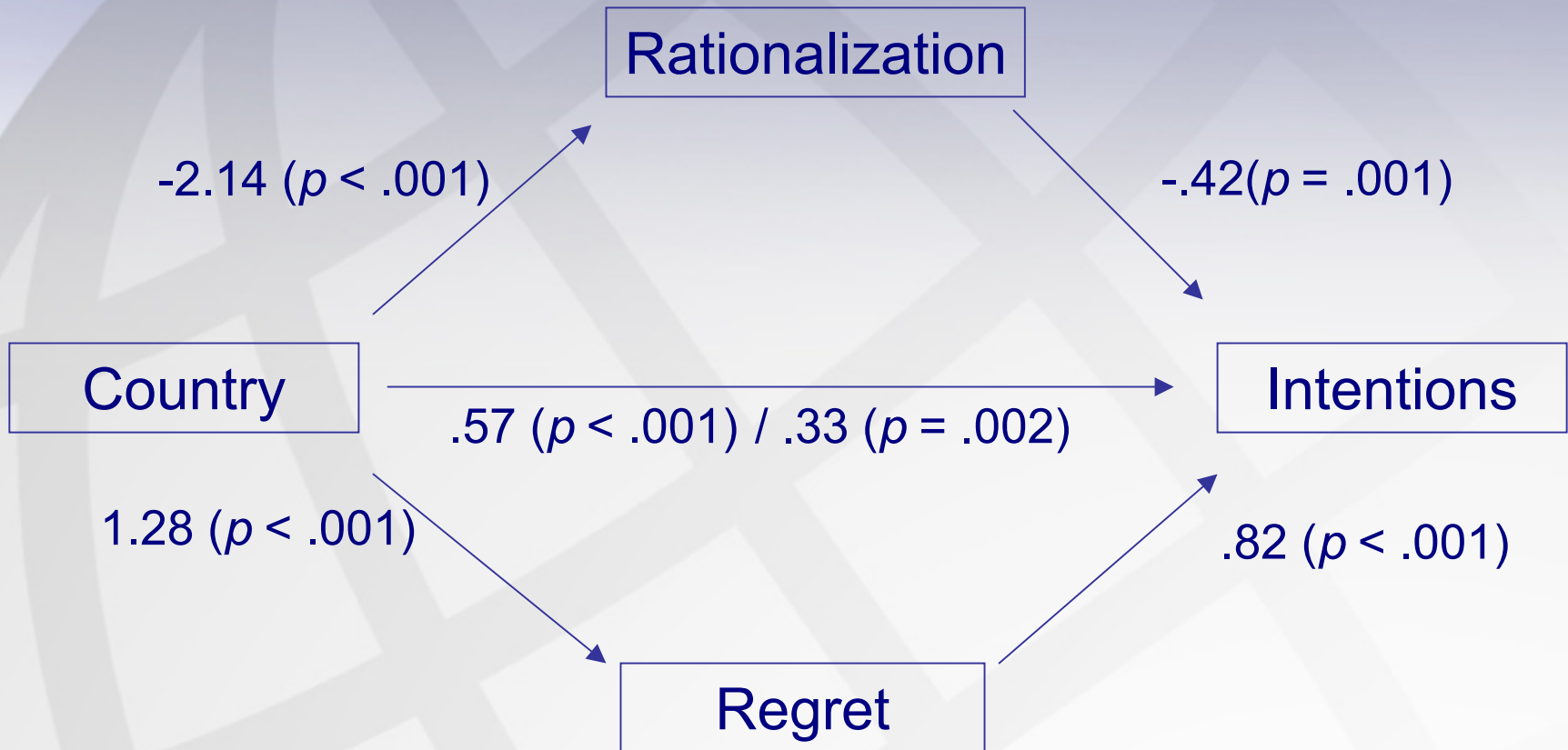


Within 6 months

Agree +
Strongly Agree

Agree +
Strongly Agree

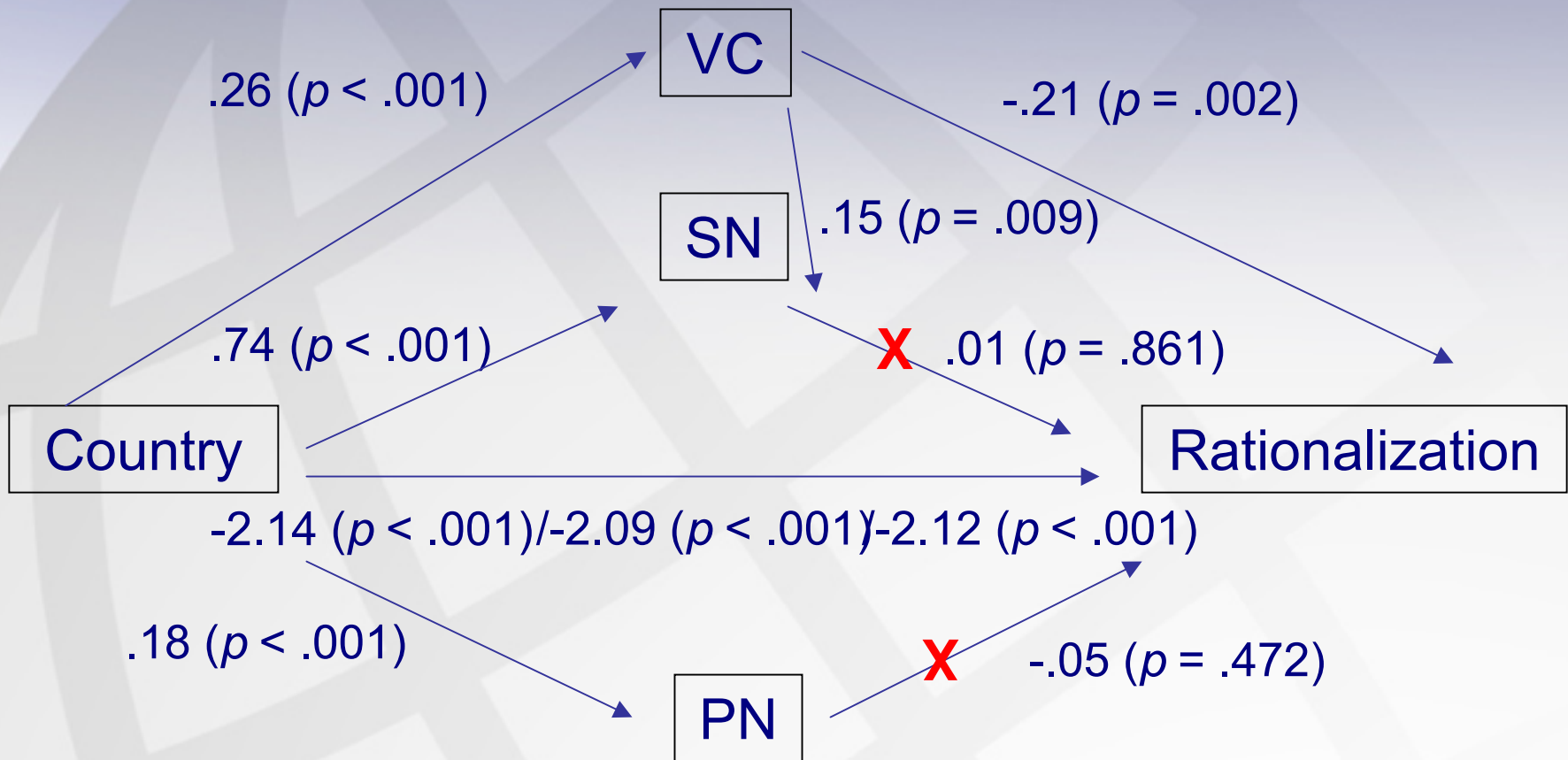
Mediation Model: Quit Intentions



Summary: Quit Intentions

- ◆ Thai smokers were more likely to have intentions to quit within six months than Malaysian smokers
- ◆ This difference in quit intentions is explained by the fact that Thai smokers were less likely to rationalize and more likely to regret smoking than Malaysian smokers

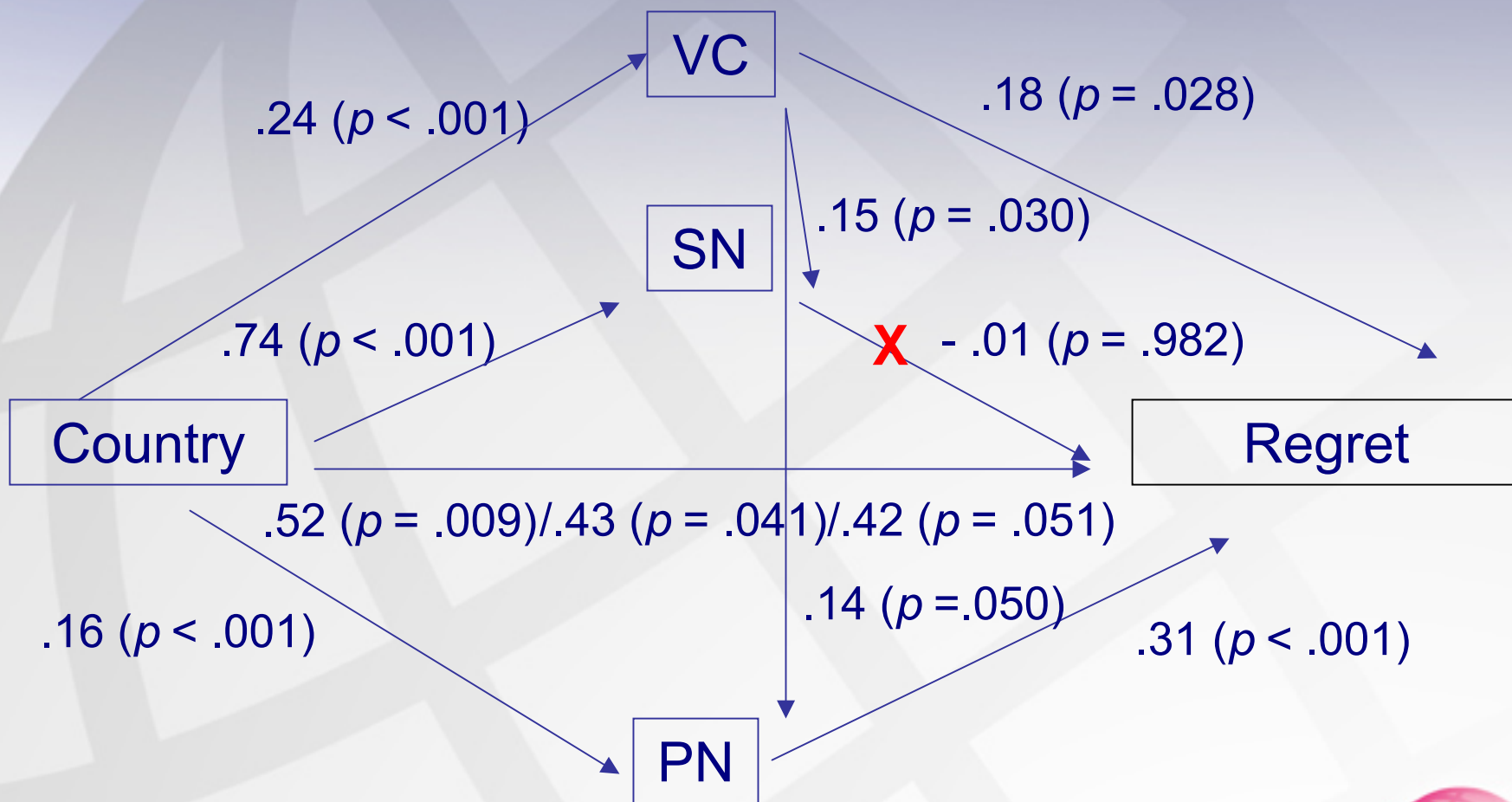
Mediation Model: Rationalization



Summary: Rationalization

- ◆ Thai smokers are less likely to rationalize smoking than Malaysian smokers
- ◆ This difference in rationalization is explained by the fact that
 - Thai smokers are more traditional and thus more strongly influenced by their family's opinion against smoking
 - Thai smokers, especially among those who are more traditional, perceive their society's disapproval is stronger than Malaysian smokers

Mediation Model: Regret



Summary: Regret

- ◆ Thai smokers are more likely to regret smoking than Malaysian smokers
- ◆ This difference in regret is explained by the fact that
 - Thai smokers are more traditional
 - Thai smokers commonly believe that people who are important to them disapprove smoking
 - Thai smokers, especially among those who are more traditional, perceive their society's and important people's disapprovals are stronger than Malaysian smokers

Implications

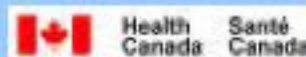
- ◆ Intervention strategies should account for smokers' emotions as well as cognitive aspects
- ◆ Importance of understanding the cultural context of smoking: Population level interventions in particular countries should be culturally tailored
- ◆ Stringent and enforceable tobacco control policies can be a cost-effective approach in reducing tobacco consumption by changing people's attitudes and norms about smoking

International Tobacco Control Policy Evaluation Project

<http://www.itcproject.org>



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