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[Contact: Paul Davies

61-299-934-510

[Research Australia](#)

Largest ever Asian smoking study reveals cardiovascular health risks

The largest ever study of smoking in the Asia Pacific Region, and one of the largest smoking studies ever conducted anywhere in the world, has dispelled a long-held myth that smokers in Asian populations are less susceptible than Western populations to the risks of smoking, such as coronary heart disease and stroke.

A paper from the George Institute for International Health on the outcomes of the study, due to be published shortly in the International Journal of Epidemiology, notes that the belief amongst Asian countries that smoking is less harmful to them than to Caucasian populations may contribute to the high prevalence of smoking in Asian countries, the low quitting rates amongst Asian male smokers, and the spread of smoking among Asian women.

Prof. Mark Woodward, Director of the Epidemiology and Biostatistics at the George Institute, who lead the study, points out that "the study, which involved data analysis of almost 500,000 Asians and 100,000 Australasians, shows that smoking poses the same risks to Asian men (and an even greater risk to Asian women) as compared to Western populations. The study also makes clear that there are real benefits to be gained, in terms of huge numbers of lives to be saved, by effectively implementing campaigns in Asia to quit smoking."

"This is particularly so amongst women, where use of tobacco is still spreading worldwide and for whom smoking has the greatest detrimental impact. Therefore, any anti tobacco campaigns in Asia should include messages specifically targeted at women," said Prof. Woodward

Importantly, the study also showed that smoking is an independent risk factor for haemorrhagic stroke, the most common type of stroke in Asia and more likely than ischaemic stroke to lead to death within a short period. The large numbers of individuals included in the study make the overall estimates of the relative effects of smoking more precise than those in most previous studies. The results also show that younger people and women have greater relative risks of cardiovascular disease from

smoking than others. It is estimated that there will be over 500 million female smokers worldwide within 20 years.

Most importantly, the study found that Asians have an increased proportional cardiovascular risk similar to Westerners from smoking cigarettes, and a similar relative reduction in risk from quitting.

"Unfortunately, there is a belief in some parts of Asia that sudden quitting can be harmful to health, and the rate of quitting amongst Asian smokers is quite low. This can be partly blamed on a lack of previous evidence on the benefits of quitting, yet this study shows that the benefits for Asians is the same as for Australasians, in terms of reduced risk of cardiovascular disease. Public health efforts to limit tobacco use are therefore urgently needed in Asia," Prof. Woodward said.

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To obtain a copy of the study papers, or arrange interviews, contact Paul Davies, Public Affairs Manager, The George Institute for International Health on ph: +61 299-934-510 email: pdavies@thegeorgeinstitute.org or visit The George Institute website at <http://www.thegeorgeinstitute.org/>.
