A complex evaluation of a complex system: Evaluating the smoking cessation system of a Public Health Unit to guide policy change

Nadia Minian; Robert Schwartz; John Garcia; Roshan Guna.
Background

- Reducing the burden of tobacco disease requires a comprehensive smoking cessation system with multi-level interventions (policies and programs) that address environmental, institutional, and social systems.
Need for protocols

- An overall vision for smoking cessation in Ontario has been developed and provides a basis for evaluating the adequacy of the existing system.
- Those responsible for tobacco control need protocols for assessing and planning local systems consistent with this vision.
Determining the gaps

- An essential step in planning of cessation systems is determine the gaps between existing services and needs as determined by an expert panel and by self-reports of smokers from various sub-population groups.
AIM

- A pilot study, aimed at determining the methodology needed to reveal the needs for a comprehensive smoking cessation service, was conducted in a Public Health Unit in Ontario.
Reaching different populations

- Important that the methodology can measure the gaps for the general population as well as for sub-groups that suffer from relatively high prevalence of tobacco use.

- Two groups were chosen for this pilot study, blue collar workers and young adults.

- The methodology used for reaching these groups is different than the general population.
Methodology

- The gaps assessment synthesizes information collected from six sources:
  - An environmental scan
  - Interviews with key informants,
  - A random phone survey with smokers and recent smokers,
  - A street intercept survey with blue collar and young adult smokers and recent smokers.
  - Semi structured interviews with smokers who want to quit,
  - Semi structured interviews with community leaders and workplace managers.
The environmental scan provided a quick way of understanding what services and policies are available, as well as their reach. There were no other documents that contained all this information.
Interviews with key informants and with community leaders

- Interviews with key informants enhanced our understanding of what services were available, their advantages and disadvantages, as well as what services were most needed in order to have a comprehensive smoking cessation strategy.

- Highlighted sub-populations that were at higher need of smoking cessation services.
Phone Survey

- We used was random digit dialing method, so were able to weight the data by age and gender to get estimates for all PHU residents.
- The phone survey showed important characteristics of how people in the PHU smoke, their quit intentions, their awareness, use and satisfaction with smoking cessation services.
- The results showed that participants smoking behaviors as well as awareness and use of services are very different than those from Ontario in general.
Street-intercept survey

Provided:

- A way to reach populations usually not reached by phone survey.
- Critical data on important characteristics of how blue collar workers and young adults smoke, their quit intentions, their awareness, use and satisfaction with smoking cessation services.
Street Intercept

- However the fact that it is not a random sample, and that the number of participants surveyed wasn’t large enough, this method does not allow for generalizing to all people in the sub-population.

- In spite of this drawback, the value of this method is shown in the insight it provides into a community of smokers not reached through other methods.
Interviews with smokers

Provided:

- Important understanding of how smokers are making choices when it comes to cessation services and products.
- Rich information on the success and failures of existing cessation services from smokers themselves as well as on the programs, products and services that smokers want to see available in the region to assist them in their quit attempts.
Conclusion

● Each component has merit in itself and, therefore, makes a contribution on its own.
● Together they provide useful guidelines about where to invest in order to have a comprehensive smoking cessation system.
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Contact Information

Nadia Minian
416.978.8137
nadia.minian@utoronto.ca

Robert Schwartz
416.978.3901
robert.schwartz@utoronto.ca