

## Tobacco dependence, risk perceptions and self-efficacy among Korean American smokers

Grace X. Ma<sup>a,\*</sup>, Carolyn Y. Fang<sup>b,1</sup>, Cecily A. Knauer<sup>c</sup>  
Yin Tan<sup>d</sup>, Steven E. Shive<sup>e</sup>

<sup>a</sup> *Department of Public Health, Center for Asian Health, College of Health Professions, Temple University, 304A Vivacqua Hall, P.O. Box 2843, Philadelphia, PA 19122-0843, USA*

<sup>b</sup> *Department of Public Health, Temple University, Division of Population Science, Fox Chase Cancer Center, Annex Building-3rd Floor, 510 Township Line Road, Cheltenham, PA 19012, USA*

<sup>c</sup> *Center for Asian Health, Department of Public Health, Temple University, 1415 N. Broad Street, Suite 116, Philadelphia, PA 19122, USA*

<sup>d</sup> *Center for Asian Health, Department of Public Health, Temple University, 1415 N Broad St., Suite 116, Philadelphia, PA 19122, USA*

<sup>e</sup> *Center for Asian Health, Department of Health, East Stroudsburg University, 200 Prospect St., East Stroudsburg, PA 18301-2999, USA*

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### Abstract

Psychosocial variables related to smoking cessation may differ among ethnic groups. This research focuses on Korean Americans, a group that receives little attention in smoking cessation research, yet has an elevated smoking rate when compared with that of the general US population. This article reports our findings on tobacco dependence, risk perceptions and self-efficacy and examines potential associations between these psychosocial variables and key demographic variables. One hundred Korean American adult smokers enrolled in the study and completed the psychosocial measurement. The majority of the participants (61%) were heavy smokers. The findings indicated that demographic factors were associated with key psychosocial variables that have been demonstrated to play a role in smoking cessation behaviors. In particular, younger age and higher educational level were associated with greater self-efficacy in quitting smoking. No differences in risk perception were observed by

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\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 215 787 5432; fax: +1 215 787 5436.

E-mail addresses: [grace.ma@temple.edu](mailto:grace.ma@temple.edu) (G.X. Ma), [carolyn.fang@fccc.edu](mailto:carolyn.fang@fccc.edu) (C.Y. Fang), [cecilyk@temple.edu](mailto:cecilyk@temple.edu) (C.A. Knauer), [ytan@temple.edu](mailto:ytan@temple.edu) (Y. Tan), [sshive@po-box.esu.edu](mailto:sshive@po-box.esu.edu) (S.E. Shive).

<sup>1</sup> Tel.: 1 215 728 4062; fax: +1 215 728 2707.

any of the demographic indicators assessed. The findings suggest that enhancing self-efficacy among older and less educated smokers may improve the efficacy of smoking cessation efforts that target Korean smokers.

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## 1. Introduction

Research has shown that psychosocial variables related to smoking cessation may differ among ethnic groups and that considering cultural variation among ethnic groups improves substance abuse treatment outcomes (Perez-Arce, Carr, & Sorenson, 1993). Although factors influencing smoking behaviors among Asian Americans as a group are beginning to be more closely examined (Jenkins, McPhee, Ha, Nam, & Chen, 1995; Ma, Shive, Toubbeh, Tan, & Zhao, 2003; Unger et al., 2000), specific Asian American subgroups, such as Korean Americans, have received little attention in smoking cessation research.

Between 1990 and 2000, the number of Koreans residing in the United States increased by 35% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000; 1990). As a minority group, Korean Americans still encounter some health-related problems that are disproportionately represented among immigrant populations. One of the major concerns is the elevated smoking rate among Korean Americans in comparison with the smoking rate of the general U.S. population. The current smoking rate among Korean Americans has been reported to be between 27% and 39% (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1997; Kim et al., 2000; Ma, Shive, Tan, & Toubbeh, 2002), which is greater than the 23.1% smoking rate in the general U.S. population (National Center for Health Statistics, 2003).

There may be a variety of factors that are responsible for the high prevalence of smoking among Korean Americans, and particularly, Korean American men. First and foremost among these is that smoking is viewed as a social behavior. Qualitative studies among male Korean smokers support the view that smoking comprises an important social medium (Kim, Son, & Nam, 2005a). Indeed, the initiation of social interaction or conversation is often begun with offering a cigarette. Smoking is a social facilitator in many Asian cultures (Ma et al., 2002), and smoking and the exchange of cigarettes are common at major social events. In addition, within many Asian cultures, including the Korean culture, there is strong pressure to conform to others. Korean men have reported feeling cultural pressure to conform to smoking peers and have reported “feeling uncomfortable” if they did not conform to this expected social practice when interacting with other Korean men to be in harmony (Kim, Son, & Nam, 2005b). In fact, it has been reported that Korean men who do not smoke often “find themselves the objects of teasing, for being too feminine or too timid” (Kim et al., 2005a, p. 616). Given the strong cultural pressure to engage in this social practice, there may be little attention to or awareness of the health risks associated with smoking. In addition, because smoking is so prevalent and so ingrained within the culture, many smokers may not perceive themselves as being capable of quitting. Therefore, there is a need to identify how key psychosocial variables may relate to smoking among Korean Americans.

The Precaution Adoption Process Model (PAPM) and the Health Belief Model (HBM) both emphasize the importance of the role of risk perceptions in motivating behavioral change. Awareness of the risks associated with a behavior, as well as acknowledgement that the behavior poses personal risk,

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