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Culture Helps Keep Asian-Americans From Quitting Smoking

FRIDAY, June 9 (HealthDay News) -- Although Asian-American immigrants smoke at a rate that's over 10 percent higher than the national average, very few programs to help them quit are targeted to that population.

And a new study shows that cultural stigmas surrounding *not* smoking may prevent many of these immigrants from worrying about smoking's effects on their health, according to study author Grace Ma, director of the Center for Asian Health at Temple University in Philadelphia.

Ma's study focused on 100 Korean smokers participating in a smoking cessation program at the center. Sixty-one percent of the first-generation immigrants participating in the study were heavy smokers. Of all of the participants, 69 percent had not tried to quit smoking in the last three months, and 59 percent had made no attempt to quit in the last 12 months.

The participants who were most interested in quitting smoking were younger, more educated immigrants.

Social influences seem to be the biggest indicator for the high percentage of smokers in this population, the study shows. For example, a common way to instigate conversation within the Korean population is to offer a cigarette.

Also, many immigrants were simply not aware of the dangers of smoking. And, since many of the communities in which these immigrants live are somewhat segregated, they just may not be getting the message, according to Ma.

"Smoking cessation programs must be culturally tailored to Asian populations -- not only in language but also intent," Ma said in a prepared statement. "Many mainstream smoking cessation programs are not culturally appropriate to the daily life of Asian immigrants."

Secondhand smoke is also proving to be a danger that many Korean-Americans are not aware of. Many women of this culture begin to pick up the habit as they watch and learn American culture -- but still aren't able to be reached by anti-smoking campaigns. Smoking is also perpetuated in this community as younger generations watch older generations smoke and continue the trends they witnessed as kids.

Results of the study appear in the current issue of *Addictive Behaviors*.

A larger study on this subject continues to determine if a culturally personalized anti-smoking campaign will help reduce smoking rates in Asian-Americans.

More information

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more information on [the dangers of smoking](http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/how2quit.htm) (<http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/how2quit.htm>).

-- Diana Kohnle

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