

The Impact of Social Support on Quitting Success among Young Adults Enrolled in a Campus-Based Provincial Quit and Win Contest

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Introduction

In Ontario, 23% of young adults (aged 20-24) still smoke. Given that 80% of Canadians have attended post-secondary school by their mid-20s, campus-based tobacco interventions can reach a large proportion of young adult smokers. ‘Quit and Win’ contests—which are free to use, easy to access, and allow smokers to quit “on their own”—are consistent with young adult smokers’ preference for self-directed quitting. Given the natural social networks that exist on campus, the social support components of such contests may be particularly effective in helping young adult smokers to quit.

This study examines: (1) the outcomes of a province-wide, campus-based Quit and Win contest tailored to the young adult population; (2) the role of social support components offered in the contest on quitting success.

Methods

In 2011, Leave The Pack Behind, a provincially-funded tobacco control initiative, hosted the annual *wouldrather...* smoking cessation contest at 42 Ontario post-secondary institutions. Each institution promoted the contest using whatever combination of recruitment approaches was available on their campus. Contest registration occurred from December 1, 2010 until January 23, 2011. During this time, 1,535 smokers (1.1% of the estimated 144,732 smokers on the campuses) registered for the contest.

- All contestants who enrolled via online registration in the “*Quit For Good*” category ($N = 631$) were invited to complete a baseline survey and telephone interviews 1-month and 3-months following the contest start date. Of the eligible registrants, 288 (45.0%) agreed to do so, and 178 completed both the 1-month and 3-month telephone interviews (61.8%).

Results

- Demographic characteristics:
 - Age, $M = 23.9$ years ($SD = 6.6$)
 - 55.6% were female
- Smoking behaviours
 - 72% were daily smokers; 28% were less-than-daily smokers

- Age of smoking initiation $M = 15.1$ years ($SD = 3.1$)
- 99.5% of participants made a quit attempt during the contest
- Table 1 shows intention-to-treat (ITT) abstinence rates 1-month, 6-weeks, and 3-months following the contest quit date.
- Table 2 shows the ratings of each social support component offered in the contest in terms of its value to the participants' quit attempt.
- Three-month follow-up data show that although social support was valuable to young adults' quit attempts in the contest, it was not related to quitting success.

Table 1
Intention-to-treat Abstinence Rates ($N = 288$)

Abstinence Period	n	%
One month	109	37.8
Contest period (6 weeks)	79	27.4
Three month	57	19.8

Table 2
Perceived Value of Contest Social Support Component to Quit Attempt ($N = 178$)

Contest Component ^a	M	SD
Having a support buddy	3.8	1.3
Receiving regular support emails	3.4	1.3
Having the chance to win a prize	4.4	0.9
Being part of a community of quitters	4.1	1.1

^a Measured on a 5-point likert scale where 5 = very valuable and 1 = not at all valuable

Discussion

- ‘Quit and Win’ contests tailored to young adults attending post-secondary institutions can be effective in helping smokers to quit.
- The high cessation rate (27%) combined with the moderately high reach of the intervention (1.1%) suggests that contests have a high population impact. Considering their low cost and ease of implementation, contests may be an ideal strategy for a population-level cessation interventions for this group.
- Social support continues to be highly valued by young adults as a quit strategy, yet in this study it did not have an impact on cessation success. It is likely the case that the success of *would rather...* is attributable to the contest as a whole.
- As “*being part of a community of quitters*” was the social support component most valued by contestants, it is reasonable to suggest that the more students successfully recruited into the contest, the more appealing the contest may become to contestants.

Significance

- Overall, a campus-based ‘Quit and Win’ contest that utilizes the natural social support systems that exist on campus can be effective in helping to motivate students to make a quit attempt and to reduce the prevalence of tobacco use among young adults.

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