

Global smokers' study criticised as biased

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The 2018 State of Smoking Survey was conducted by Kantar Public to "better understand smokers, their experiences and challenges they face when trying to quit smoking", according to the foundation. "The data will shape the development of research to determine the best solutions to accelerate the end of smoking across diverse cultures and economic conditions."

But international tobacco control advocates said the research was a ploy to help PMI keep people dependent on tobacco products.

"We don't need a Philip Morris-funded survey to tell us why people smoke. Smoking is a worldwide health crisis created by tobacco companies — period. Corporations like Philip Morris International created and continue to drive the smoking epidemic by targeting children as customers, using slick and deceptive marketing to sell lethal tobacco products and lobbying and litigating to block solutions that are proven to reduce smoking rates," said the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, the International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease, and Vital Strategies in a joint statement.

The survey included 17,421 people in 13 countries. In SA, face-to-face interviews were conducted with 1,200 participants. Only 36% of the South African smokers said they had tried to quit, the second-lowest rate among all the countries surveyed except Lebanon. And only 41% of South African smokers said they planned to stop, the third-lowest rate after Greece and Lebanon. One in five South African smokers did not think smoking was harmful.

Only 38% of South African participants said e-cigarettes and vaping could be harmful, the lowest rate among the 13 countries surveyed. By contrast, 83% of Greek and 78% of US participants considered them harmful.

In response to the criticism that the research was a marketing ploy, President of the Foundation for a Smoke-Free World, Derek Yach said:

"The survey was conducted by Kantar Public, an integrated consulting and research agency, an agency that also does ... many major national smoking and health surveys. There needs to be a new urgency to engage smokers to develop truly effective cessation and safe harm reduction products priced for developing countries."

"SA has made progress in raising taxes and regulating sales to kids. This has slowed and reduced smoking. Now a serious push is needed to support smokers to quit or reduce their risks," he said.

Yach emphasised that the survey results indicated 50% of smokers believe nicotine causes cancer and that e-cigarettes are as dangerous or more dangerous than cigarettes. "Science suggests nicotine does not cause cancer and that e-cigarettes lower risks by 95%+ compared to combustible cigarettes," he said.

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