

Gender Differences on Smoking Behavior and Perception on Smoking: Evidence from a Longitudinal Survey of ITC-Thailand

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Introduction

Tobacco use among women may not be viewed as a priority health issue, assuming that it is a problem confined to men because of men's much higher rate of smoking (i.e. about 4 times higher than women). Nevertheless, the prevalence of tobacco use among women is on the rise, while smoking rates among men have either reached a plateau or are in a slow decline (Kin, 2009). By 2025, it is predicted that 20% of the female population will be smokers. Consequently tobacco control campaigns targeted at helping smoking women quit while indirectly preventing non-smoking women from smoking is equally as important as those targeting men. To formulate gender-specific tobacco control campaigns to reach current population of smokers more effectively, we need to understand differences between smoking women and men and whether they have changed overtime.

Previous research on gender and tobacco control draws attention on emphasizing different impacts of social, cultural and economic factors on women's and men's smoking behavior (e.g. Kirkland et al, 2004) or distinguishing gender gap due to characteristics' differential versus gender differences per se in smoking behavior (e.g. Bauer et al. 2006). While these studies provide useful knowledge in preventing non-smokers to smoking, they do not necessary capture details of smoking behavior and perception of smoking women compared with men.

We use the case of Thailand where the proportion of women smoking is much lower than men and relatively low compared to western countries to answer the research question of to what extent that smoking women are distinct from men and whether the distinctions have remained or changed overtime. Our analysis aims at exploring smoking behavior and perceptions towards smoking and tobacco control campaigns.

Our paper contributes to the topic of gender and tobacco control by providing evidence based on cross-sectional panel data and the details about smoking behavior, beliefs/attitudes about smoking and tobacco control campaigns and advertising overtime. We employ data of adult

smokers interviewed in the nationally-representative ITC-SEA Thailand project surveyed annually since 2005. We use data of the starting wave (Wave 1) and the most recent available data set (Wave 5) to capture changes overtime. Of 2,000 adult smokers in Wave 1, 8% are women, while the proportion increases to 9% (of 1,737 smokers) at Wave 5. Descriptive analysis showing smoking behavior of smoking women and their perception towards smoking compared with men are conducted. Our data analysis compares population composition distinctions and compares Thai advertising and tobacco control campaigns over same period or slightly earlier. This allows us to see how distinct the smoking women are from men as a population and whether those distinctions have grown or changed over time.

Data and Methods

Our analysis is based on cross-sectional panel data and the details about smoking behavior, beliefs/attitudes about smoking and tobacco control campaigns and advertising. We employ data of adult smokers interviewed in the ITC-SEA Thailand project surveyed annually since 2005. Our analysis uses data of the starting wave (Wave 1) and the most recent available data set (Wave 5) to capture changes overtime. Of the sample in Wave 1, 8% (154 of 2,000 adult smokers) are women, while the proportion increases to 9% (173 of 1,737 smokers) at Wave 5. Descriptive analysis showing smoking behavior of female smokers and their perception towards smoking are conducted.

Some points of preliminary findings

- Previous study found that smoking is associated with low level of economic status such as low income, low status jobs, unemployed, lone parents or divorced, and low level of education (Kirkland et al., 2004). Using data on adult smokers, our study adds to the literature that the disadvantageous condition may even greater among women who smoke compared to men.
- Our findings shed light on changes in gender differences among smokers over time.
- Smoking women are different than men in some aspects. Over time some differences persist, while some fade away;
 - Smokers are increasingly found in urban -- smoking women more increasingly urban than men

- Smoking women are in more disadvantaged conditions compared with men (e.g. gender gap in education between smoking women and men increases from Wave 1 to Wave 5)
- Smoking women smoke in a smaller amount daily than men, but the difference is narrowing over time
- Female smokers are less likely to smoke both types of cigarette (factory-made and hand-rolled), but the gender gap in Wave 5 is smaller than Wave 1.
- Smoking women reported ever tried menthol or light/mild/low tar cigarette less than men. Although the differences are significant in both waves, the differences lessen over time.
- Female smokers are more likely to report smoke light cigarette than men. The differences are significant in Wave 1, but not significant in Wave 5, implying the decrease in gender differences over time.
- Smoking women are more likely than men to have none of their five close friends smoke, implying women being less dependent on friends than men. The differences did not change much between 2 waves.
- Smoking women have 1st cigarette in a later time than men, the gender differences are significant in both waves and increase over time.
- Smoking women perceive that smoking among women is acceptable more than men. There is no change over time.
- Smoking women are less likely than men to perceive that they will benefit very much if quit. These gender differences are significant at Wave 1, but not significant at Wave 5, which implies that smokers get similar over time.