A Social Organizational Approach to Monitoring Tobacco Use And Control

Robert McMillen, Liesel Ritchie, Social Science Research Center, Mississippi State University
Ellen Jones, Mississippi State Department of Health
Arthur Cosby, Social Science Research Center, Mississippi State University

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ABSTRACT

In the spring of 1999, the Mississippi State Department of Health contracted with the Social Science Research Center (SSRC) to conduct an evaluation of the Mississippi Tobacco Pilot Program. As part of this endeavor, researchers at the SSRC developed a social organizational approach to monitor the social climate in which tobacco control and prevention efforts are taking place. This approach has the capability to guide intervention efforts, as well as to provide a benchmark for tobacco prevention program evaluations and research. Specifically, The 1999 Mississippi Social Climate Survey of Tobacco Use and Tobacco Control was designed to measure and ultimately monitor the fundamental position of tobacco control and tobacco use in the state of Mississippi. The telephone survey of 3,000 adults living in Mississippi households identified social norms, practices, and beliefs concerning tobacco use and tobacco control within important societal institutions, such as family and friendship groups; education; government and political order; economy and work; health and medical care; recreation, leisure, and sports; and mass culture and communication. Heuristic measures were applied to these societal norms, practices and beliefs in order to establish benchmark information about the culture in which the tobacco pilot program was implemented. Public health administrators and social science researchers used this benchmark study to inform funding decisions for tobacco prevention and control. The Year 2000 National Social Climate Survey of Tobacco Use and Tobacco Control was conducted in July and August of 2000, and provides national benchmark data with which to compare Mississippi results. Findings from both the Mississippi and national studies are presented.

INTRODUCTION

Social Climate
In recent years, researchers have recognized the need for theory driven research on the social climate in which tobacco use and tobacco control efforts take place (e.g., Duncan, Duncan, Biglan, & Ary, 1998; Tyas & Pederson, 1998). Our goal was to contribute to the understanding of tobacco control and tobacco use by introducing the Social Climate Survey as a measure of the social climate in which tobacco prevention efforts occur. We designed the 1999 Mississippi Social Climate Survey of Tobacco Use and Tobacco Control (McMillen, Ritchie, Robertson, Frese, & Cosby, 1999) to measure, and ultimately monitor the fundamental position of tobacco control and tobacco use.

Social forces have an enormous impact on both behavior and an individual's beliefs about the appropriateness of a behavior (Latane, 1981; Lewin, 1951; Newcomb, 1950). In order to understand behaviors and beliefs about tobacco, it is necessary to understand the social climate in which individuals develop and maintain these behaviors and beliefs. More specifically, it is necessary to understand the social climate within each social institution that impacts decisions about tobacco. The concept of societal institutions, taken from the sociological literature, provides a perspective that is useful in monitoring the social norms, practices, and beliefs surrounding tobacco use and tobacco control efforts.

As a fundamental component of a society social institutions, such as the family or the political order, emerge as clusterings of beliefs, norms, and practices. Moreover, in each of these institutional areas, beliefs, norms, and practices about tobacco use and tobacco control have evolved. It is these institutional beliefs, norms, and practices that form the essence of the ingrained status of tobacco use in the social fabric of American society.

A few remarks about the Social Climate Survey follow. It is important to note that the Social Climate Survey is not intended as an adult tobacco survey of an individual. Each individual respondent serves as a proxy for each social institution impacting his/her life by providing information about the norms, practices, and beliefs within these institutions.

We designed the Social Climate Survey with several audiences in mind. First, reports from the Social Climate Survey can inform and evaluate the efforts of public health practitioners, such as the Mississippi State Department of Health and the Partnership for a Healthy Mississippi. Second, we hope that this social climate approach to understanding a public health issues benefits the social science research on these issues. And third, summary data from the Social Climate Survey can guide the decisions of policy makers. We certainly recognize the need to tailor the information according to the specific needs of each audience.

Finally, we recognize the need to conduct national and state-level surveys on an annual basis in order to accurately monitor the social climate in Mississippi. Toward this goal, we administered the Social Climate Survey to both a national sample and a Mississippi sample in July of 2000. Subject to financial support, we will continue to administer this survey on an annual basis in order to accurately detect changes in the social climate.

METHODS

Survey design
The development of the survey was determined from an extensive review of extant measurement instruments in the tobacco prevention research. Comments and reviews were then solicited from senior scientists at the SSRC, the MSDH, the CDC's Office of Smoking and Health, and a panel of consultants hired to support the overall evaluation component of the Mississippi Tobacco Pilot Program.

Data Collection
The data collection for the 2000 Social Climate Survey was done via telephone interviews with a simple random sample of Mississippi adults living in households with telephones. The data were collected in 2000 (July and August) by the Social Science Research Center at Mississippi State University. Households were selected using random digit dialing procedures.

Of the households contacted in the national sample, 1,503 completed the interview and 504 (25.1%) refused to participate. The sampling error (binomial questions with 50/50 split) for the total data set is no larger than ± 2.5 (95 confidence interval).

Of the households contacted in the Mississippi sample, 803 completed the interview and 142 (25.1%) refused to participate. The sampling error (binomial questions with 50/50 split) for the total data set is no larger than ± 3.5 (95 confidence interval).

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Outcome Measures
The Social Climate Survey consists of several items designed to measure institutional norms, practices, and beliefs surrounding tobacco. The measurement level of these items allows us to create indices that summarize some aspects of the social climate. Each of these indices has is scaled to vary between one and 100, with higher values indicating desirable outcomes.

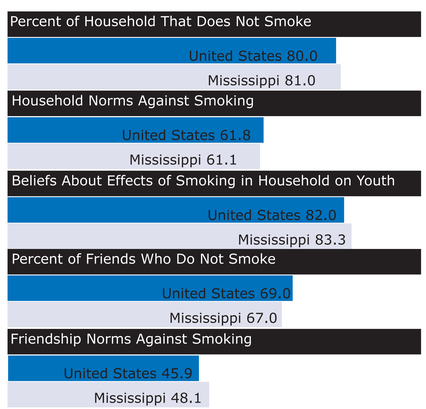
General Outcomes
The following points capture some of the more obvious social climate themes. These can be used in describing the current social climate in Mississippi for tobacco control and tobacco use.

There are strong and consistent norms controlling access and availability of tobacco products for the youth population. In practically every assessment where age was either explicitly stated or implied in this question, the survey indicated the presence of normative structures. Closely following in importance of determining appropriate norms, practices, and beliefs is the consistency of limiting tobacco access in schools.

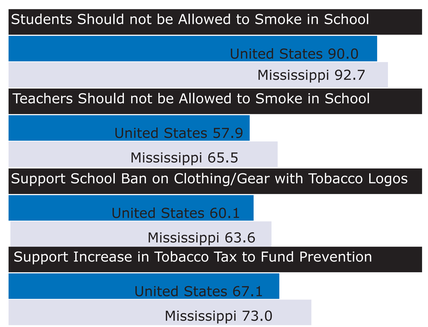
Despite tobacco companies' claims to the contrary, people overwhelmingly recognize the danger of tobacco use. This belief system is universally held even in the context of the tobacco companies' attempts to claim otherwise.

The institutional arenas of recreation, leisure, and sport appear to be lagging in the evolution of strong tobacco control practices. Note, however, that there is substantial support for tobacco control in these settings.

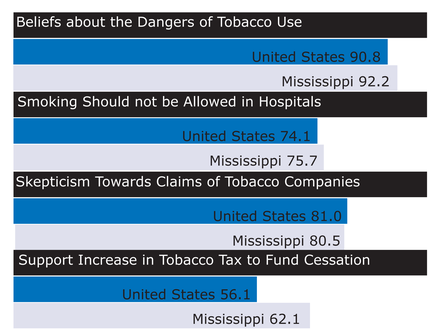
Family and Friendship



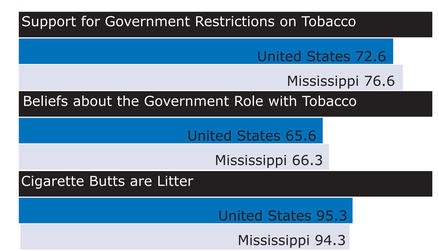
Education



Health and Medical Care

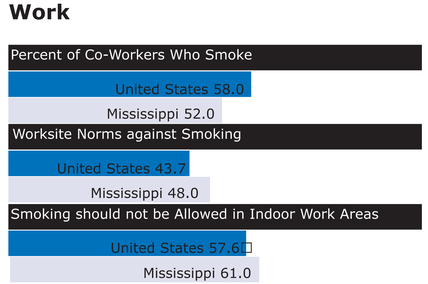


Government and Political Order

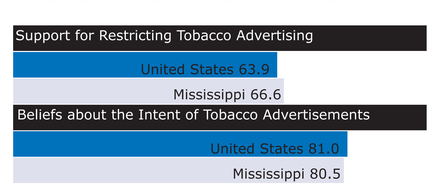


Recreation, Leisure and Sports

Work



Mass Culture and Communication



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