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Monitoring Successes in the Mississippi Tobacco Pilot Program: A Report from the Mississippi Social Climate Survey

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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. In order to monitor progress towards intermediate goals such as policy changes, changes in social norms, exposure of individuals to environmental tobacco smoke, and the impact of pro-tobacco influences, researchers at the SSRC developed a social organizational approach to monitor the social climate in which public health efforts take place. The survey identified normative beliefs about tobacco use, clean air practices, and health beliefs within important societal institutions, such as the household, education, work place, and recreational settings. Researchers at the SSRC administered the Social Climate Survey of Tobacco Control a representative sample of MS adults in July of 1999 and in July of 2000. Comparisons revealed significant improvements in the social climate during the first year for the program. Normative beliefs, health beliefs, and individual clean air practices demonstrated remarkable improvement. However, community clean air practices have not improved.

INTRODUCTION

This approach operationalizes the concept of social climate into a set of quantifiable social and environmental indicators. The Social Climate Survey provides a method to monitor changes in social and environmental objectives, as well as an institutional framework to organize and interpret these results. To illustrate, this approach surveys normative beliefs about a health risk behavior, institutional practices and policies concerning the behavior, and knowledge about the health risks of the behavior within each of the social institutions that impacts a person's daily life. The Social Climate Survey serves as one aspect of an objective and informed analysis of program outcomes and processes that can be utilized to enhance the capacity to design, implement, and evaluate health promotion interventions.

Applied to tobacco control, the social climate survey assesses these indicators within 1) households, 2) educational settings, 3) work sites, 4) health and medical care systems, 5) recreational settings, 6) government and political institutions, and 7) mass media and communication. This annual, cross-sectional survey assesses, and ultimately monitors these indicators in order to:

1) Categorize indicators by level of acceptance in order to identify potentially modifiable social climate factors
2) Identify disparities in health risk factors, knowledge of health risks, and support for smokefree environments
3) Identify successful tobacco control program impacts, and approaches to make these comprehensive programs better
4) Assesses the impact that health care providers have upon active and passive smoking
5) Use of continuous response options allows more sophisticated analyses to detect relationships among social climate variables and contextual factors

METHOD

The concept and design of the Social Climate Survey were developed by a group of scientists at the SSRC. The Social Climate Survey measures the acceptability of tobacco use and the support for tobacco control in the following social institutions: family and friendship groups; education; work-place; government and political order; health and medical care; recreation, leisure and sports; and mass culture and communication. The development of the survey was determined not only from a reviews of extant measurement instruments in the tobacco prevention research, but also from a panel of consultants who have substantial expertise in the various areas of tobacco control research. Researchers at the SSRC worked closely with the Mississippi State Department of Health and The Partnership for a Healthy Mississippi (the two organizations responsible for statewide tobacco control programs in Mississippi) in the development of the Social Climate Survey. The CDC's Office on Smoking and Health and a panel of consultants provided comments and reviews of the survey instrument as well. Scientists at the SSRC developed many of the items included in the survey. Others were selected from existing measurement instruments with established validity. Specifically, the Social Climate Survey includes items from the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (to establish if respondent is a smoker, former smoker, or never smoker), the Current Population Survey - Tobacco Use Supplement, and California Adult Tobacco Surveys.

The data for this report were collected via the Social Climate Survey. We administered this survey to a random sample of Mississippi adults in 1999 and 2000, and to a sample of United States adults in 2000. This report includes data from three separate surveys:

1) the 1999 Mississippi Social Climate Survey, N = 3,040
2) the 2000 Mississippi Social Climate Survey, N = 809

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

In just one year Mississippi has experienced profound improvements in the social climate of tobacco control. Perhaps the most notable change occurred in Mississippi homes. In 2000, 42.0 percent of Mississippi households were smokefree. This rate is a 39 percent increase from 1999 when only 25.8 percent of households were smokefree. In just one year, 148,000 more Mississippi households became smokefree. This increase translates into 406,000 Mississippians who are no longer exposed to second-hand smoke in their homes. Comparisons of the Mississippi social climate in 1999 to 2000 also revealed that support among Mississippi adults increased significantly for clean air policies in public places, limitations on tobacco advertisements, and government regulation of the tobacco industry. Perceptions of the health risks of tobacco use increased, as well.

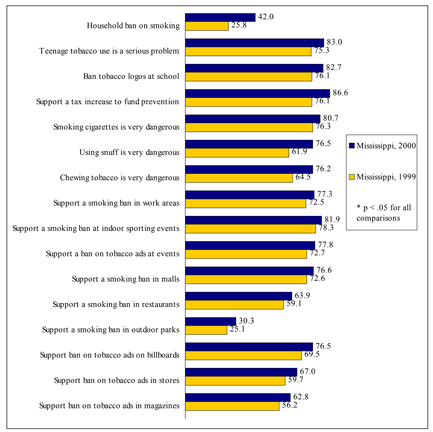
On the whole, support in Mississippi increased significantly for one-third of the tobacco control issues assessed by the Social Climate Survey. It is hypothetically possible that the observed improvements result from spurious factors, rather than from the pilot program efforts. Perhaps these improvements reflect a national trend. However, two aspects of the data suggest that the pilot program activities are primarily responsible for the observed improvements.

First, these improvements all occurred between July 1999 and July 2000, the period in which most of The Partnership programs became fully implemented. None of the programs in the MTPP were fully implemented before we conducted the 1999 Mississippi Social Climate Evaluation Survey. Moreover, many of the observed improvements from 1999 to 2000 involved issues directly targeted by The Partnership and the MSDH.

Second, the improvements in Mississippi do not appear to reflect national attitudes as a whole. Comparisons of the 2000 Mississippi social climate and the US. social climate indicated that the social climate in Mississippi was more progressive than the rest of the nation on many aspects of tobacco control. Mississippi experienced more support than the US.. for the government regulation of the tobacco industry, tobacco advertising, and tobacco sales, as well as for increases in state tobacco taxes to fund tobacco education programs, cessation programs, and law enforcement of youth access restrictions. Comparisons of Mississippi to the nation also revealed that support for clean air policies that prohibit smoking in public places was greater in Mississippi.

In conclusion, our research shows that citizens perceive at least one critical area of need: putting teeth in the public policies that support changing beliefs about the risks tobacco use poses. Despite substantial public support for smokefree recreational and leisure settings, Mississippi lags behind the rest of the nation on clean air policy issues.

The Mississippi Social Climate, 1999-2000



Percent of respondents who support normative beliefs, recognize health risks, or report tobacco control practices

The Mississippi Social Climate, 1999-2000

Practices

In 2000, 42.0 percent of Mississippi households were smoke free. This rate is a 39 percent increase from 1999 when only 25.8 percent of households were smoke free . In just one year 148 thousand more Mississippi households became smoke free. This increase translates into 406 thousand Mississippians who are no longer exposed to second-hand smoke in their homes.

Beliefs

155,000 more Mississippi adults considered teenage tobacco use to be a serious problem in 2000. This is an increase from 75.3 percent in 1999 to 83.0 percent in 2000.

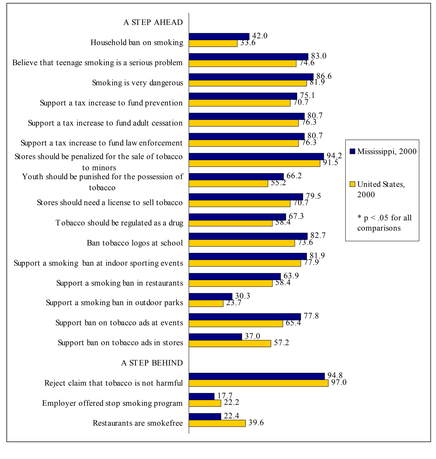
Between 1999 and 2000, the percent of Mississippi adults that believed tobacco use to be very dangerous increased by 12 percent for cigarettes, increased by 15 percent for chewing tobacco, and by 19 percent for snuff.

In 2000, 1.6 million adults supported a tax increase to fund education for prevention. This is an increase from 78.3 percent in 1999 to 81.9 percent in 2000.

The belief that clothing and gear with tobacco logos should be prohibited in schools increased from 76.1 to 82.7 percent.

Support for prohibiting tobacco advertisements at sporting and cultural events increased from 72.7 to 77.8 percent, on billboards increased from 69.5 to 76.5 percent, in grocery and convenience stores increased from 59.7 to 67.0 percent, and in magazines from 56.2 to 62.8 percent.

Support for Clean Air Policies

Support for strict clean air policies increased from 72.5 to 77.3 percent in indoor work areas, increased from 78.3 to 81.9 percent in indoor sporting events, increased from 72.6 to 76.6 percent in shopping malls, increased from 59.1 to 63.9 percent in restaurants, and increased from 25.1 to 30.3 percent in outdoor parks.

Mississippi and National Comparisons, 2000