Smoking prevalence in England is below 20% for the first time in 80 years

A recent BMJ clinical review provided a useful and timely update on smoking cessation. We thought it would be useful to expand on the section of the review on ‘Who smokes’ by sharing the latest findings on smoking prevalence in England from a large national surveillance study which has been tracking smoking prevalence since 2006. Each month a new sample of approximately 1800 individuals aged ≥ 16 are selected using a form of random location sampling and complete a computer-assisted household survey with a trained interviewer. Prevalence data are weighted to match English census data on age, sex, and socioeconomic group. The methods have been shown to result in a sample that is nationally representative in its socio-demographic composition and proportion of smokers as compared with other large national surveys such as Health Survey for England. An advantage of the Smoking Toolkit Study is that the data are available within weeks of collection and published online at www.smokinginengland.info.

For the first time in probably 80 years, England has seen smoking prevalence fall below 20%. In 2013, 22,167 adults were surveyed. The prevalence of cigarette smoking was 19.3% (95%CI 18.8 to 19.8). Smoking was rare at the start of the 20th century but increased relentlessly until the publication of ‘Smoking and Health’ in 1962 by which stage over 70% of men and 40% of women smoked.

The decline in prevalence started in the 1970s and since then has averaged 0.6% per year; in 2013 it was slightly above this at 0.8% (www.smokinginengland.info). There is much still to be done, particularly on the social gradient in smoking, which contributes substantially to health inequalities. However, we hope that breaking the 20% barrier will motivate smoking
cessation efforts across the country, including making more use of our stop-smoking services. 

References


Competing interests

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no other financial relationships with any organisations that might have an interest in the submitted work.