

# Assessing tobacco use in multi-ethnic communities

Executive Summary: Report of the PATH funded project – Use of tobacco and related substances by ethnic minorities: the development of a culturally valid measure

By

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<b>Contents</b>	<b>Page</b>
<b>Summary</b>	<b>3 – 4</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Aims &amp; Objectives</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Methods</b>	<b>6 – 13</b>
<b>Results/Outcomes</b>	<b>13 – 32</b>
<b>Discussion and conclusions</b>	<b>32 – 34</b>
<b>The future</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>35</b>

## **Executive Summary**

### **Introduction**

Data about tobacco use in a range of ethnic groups are usually collected by questionnaire, either by self-completion or face-to face interview. Recent research has shown that surveys of the use of tobacco and related substances by members of ethnic minority groups in the UK have given insufficient attention to translation procedures, comprehensiveness, appropriateness and cultural sensitivity.

### **Aims & Objectives**

The main aim was to develop cross-culturally valid questionnaires that can be used in multi-ethnic surveys to collect high quality data on the use of tobacco and related substances.

### **Methods**

The groups chosen were the four largest ethnic minority groups in Scotland, that is Chinese Cantonese speakers, Indian Sikh Punjabi speakers, Pakistani Urdu speakers and Bangladeshi Sylheti speakers.

Nine key categories of questions were identified: the smoking of cigarettes, bidis, cigars, pipes and hookahs, smoking cessation, dependence, context of smoking and the use of smokeless tobacco. A questionnaire was compiled in English containing key questions on these categories of tobacco use. The Health Survey for England 1999 was used as the primary source of questions and their translations. Other surveys were used when a question was not available. Where a question had not been translated by any previous surveys, our bilingual co-workers were asked to translate.

Four bilingual co-workers were recruited, each of whom recruited a panel of ten lay people from their community to be consulted about the translated questionnaire and related issues during the project. Individual interviews with each member of the panel assessed the cultural and linguistic appropriateness of each tobacco-related question for use in the participant's community. Discussion groups were carried out with male and female subgroups of the Punjabi, Urdu and Cantonese panels and one with Sylheti men. These reviewed the translations for each question to achieve consensus. A questionnaire was developed using the modified questions and was field tested by administering it to a sample of up to 20 respondents from each language group. To ascertain cross-cultural equivalence and comparability of each language version with each other, a final discussion took place between members of the research team (LH, SH, RSB) and three co-workers. Then the research team met to review the questionnaire structure and format.

### **Results**

Co-workers had difficulty in conveying successfully to the panel the nature of the task. Some panel members found the interview task somewhat long, repetitive and confusing. Punjabi and Urdu speakers rarely used a single language in the interviews, discussion group and field-testing.

The Chinese community did not use bidis, hookahs or smokeless tobacco. These categories were excluded from the Chinese questionnaire. It was unacceptable for Punjabi Sikh people to use tobacco. For Urdu speaking Pakistanis there was no outright taboo on tobacco, particularly for men, but it was not encouraged as people were aware of its negative effects. Smoking was not wholly acceptable within the Bangladeshi community, particularly among women. It was acceptable to use paan and this was common amongst women as well as men. Panel members thought that people from these

communities would answer questions about smoking and tobacco use fairly truthfully if the purpose was medical research and the results were kept completely confidential.

Many changes to the original translations of the questionnaires were necessary. These included re-phrasing of sentences, change of expression, substitution of more easily understood words, addition of words to clarify meaning and modifications to ensure cultural appropriateness. After team discussion the majority of questionnaire items were deemed comparable and equivalent across language groups. A further question was added to the final questionnaire to allow current smokers of cigarettes or bidis to specify regularity of smoking: '*Do you smoke [cigarettes/ bidis] regularly, or do you smoke them only occasionally?*'.

## **Outcomes**

All the original aims and objectives have been wholly or partially met and the project has:

- shown that changes were necessary in existing translations of key tobacco-related questions, including those prepared nationally
- developed new translations of questions
- compiled a set of core questions developed in each language, including some culture-specific questions
- constructed a tobacco-related questionnaire which has been tested for understandability, linguistic and cultural appropriateness and face validity for use with Urdu, Punjabi, Cantonese and Sylheti speakers
- produced Cantonese and Sylheti questionnaires in an innovative way which allows standardisation of questionnaire administration - the oral Cantonese is written using the standard Chinese script, and the Sylheti is written phonetically using Roman script
- demonstrated the practical and organisational challenges of carrying out research with several different ethnic groups in the community
- made some recommendations for future work developing this field of inquiry.

## **7.2 Summary of results**

This project found that changes were necessary in existing translations of key tobacco-related questions in order to ensure understanding by lay people from the Indian Punjabi-speaking, Pakistani Urdu-speaking, Chinese Cantonese-speaking communities. In addition, this project developed previously non-translated questions in the above languages, in addition to Sylheti, that are necessary to collect comprehensive information on smoking and tobacco use in these groups. Questionnaires were developed in each of these four languages.

This project also yielded important insights into the practicalities of recruiting, training and carrying out research in ethnic minority communities using bilingual co-workers, and of involving lay ethnic minority communities in research.

## **8 Discussion and conclusions**

This project has developed versions of a tobacco-related questionnaire, which have been tested for understandability, linguistic and cultural appropriateness and face validity for use with Urdu, Punjabi, Cantonese and Sylheti speakers. In both oral languages, Cantonese and Sylheti, questionnaires have been produced in an innovative way, which allows strict standardisation of questionnaire administration; the oral Cantonese is written using the standard Chinese script, and the Sylheti is written phonetically using Roman script. A set of reasonably comprehensive core questions have been developed in each

language, and culture-specific questions included where appropriate. Existing questionnaires will require further proofreading, typesetting and validation before being used in the field.

All original aims and objectives have been met as follows:

- Key questions in existing surveys were reviewed and included in the tobacco-related questionnaire developed for use in Cantonese, Punjabi, Urdu and Sylheti speakers. Participants were asked if there were any key areas of tobacco use that were important for their community that had been omitted from the questionnaire. Supplementary questions were not required as the questionnaire content was deemed relevant to tobacco use in each of the ethnic minority groups.
- The cultural acceptability and sensitivity of the questions were assessed via individual interviews and subsequent discussion groups with a panel of lay participants
- Questions that were not deemed to be culturally or linguistically accurate were modified as suggested by our panel of lay community members.
- The conceptual equivalence of the questions was established via a team discussion method during which all language versions were compared with all others for equivalence of meaning.
- We took steps towards ascertaining the optimal mode of administration of questions. Insights gained throughout the field work process showed that simple, straightforward questions in colloquial language were the best way to ensure understanding across a range of lay people, and that questionnaire interviewers need to be thoroughly trained in the methods of questionnaire administration to ensure rigorous completion of a standardised questionnaire, particularly given respondents' tendency not to answer in a simple way as indicated by the question's response options, but to provide an elaborate narrative. Moreover, interviewers must be convinced of the importance of not putting their own interpretation on statements made by participants. The researcher needs to monitor closely the quality of data collection.
- We deduced general principles concerning modes of enquiry into lifestyle factors with ethnic minority groups. First, there is a reluctance for people to pronounce upon or to criticise statements they see as emanating from an official source. Thus there will be a tendency for respondents to try to answer questions even if they do not fully understand the meaning. Thus prolonged and sensitive questioning may be required in order to extract alternative ways of expressing an idea or question.
- Second, modes of interaction, custom and polite discourse within a particular culture, may conflict with current modes of research enquiry where questions are put to a respondent without any social niceties and where the interviewers are trained to maintain a neutral stance on the topic under enquiry.
- Third, when smoking or tobacco use or, indeed any other activity, is a particularly taboo behaviour amongst a certain ethnic or gender group, great care must be taken to reassure respondents of anonymity and confidentiality and of the importance of accurate data to benefit the health of the respondent's community in the future. There were indications from this study that sensitive questions being asked by a high-profile member of the community who is personally known to the respondent may lead to socially acceptable, inaccurate, answers being given.

The quality and commitment of bilingual staff are vital in a project such as this, where the researcher has little direct contact with the participants and cannot speak all of the languages under study. In all language groups, quality control of interview data generated in languages other than that spoken by the English-speaking researcher has been challenging.

In order that researchers can oversee robust research in a range of languages not spoken by the main researcher, it is recommended that written phonetic versions of the original translated questions are developed, with word-for-word annotation to clarify the English meaning of each non-English word, in addition to written phonetic versions of any suggested modified questions. In this way it should be less difficult for an English-speaking researcher to monitor the changes and quality of the developing questionnaire throughout field work and modification. Otherwise data can become lost or difficult to follow.

During the current project, whilst it has been possible to produce a phonetic version of Sylheti using the Roman script, it was the researcher's opinion that this would have been much more difficult to do for Cantonese, as the sounds made are so subtle and different to the English that it was difficult for the co-worker to spell out the terms in English, and therefore preferable to record the Cantonese using Chinese characters.

It is also vital for researchers to be aware of the practical and organisational challenges of carrying out research with several different community groups. The process is extremely time and resource-intensive, and swift progress can be difficult when co-workers have a range of other commitments. It is vital to bear this in mind when planning a similar project and to allow time/ funding to enable for the final report to be double-checked for accuracy by bilingual staff.

It is important for researchers to anticipate that sessional bilingual co-workers often have a range of other commitments and it should be ensured that they have the time available to make sufficient progress on similar studies. For example, one appointee failed to make adequate progress with recruiting panel members and carrying out interviews, and agreed that she could not commit to completing the interviews. Another co-worker, a previously shortlisted applicant who had been interviewed for the post some months previously, agreed to complete the project for us. Developing a 'pool' of bilingual co-workers qualified to carry out this type of work is advisable.

The final Punjabi, Urdu and Cantonese questionnaires produced contain questions in non-English scripts that were hand-written by the bilingual co-workers, then manually cut and pasted into a questionnaire format by the researcher. Some effort had been made to produce typed versions of these questionnaires. However, the cost of doing so using a professional service was deemed to be prohibitive. After liaison with staff at the University of Edinburgh's language laboratory, it was possible to enable a departmental computer using Windows XP to display non-English fonts in a Word document. However, the computer keyboard had Roman letters on its keys and therefore it was necessary to produce a separate document indicating which Roman key (or combination of keys) signified each letter or character in Urdu or Punjabi. Therefore, for a typist not familiar with the program or the keyboard, the process of locating each letter, using the appropriate key on the Roman keyboard and typing a question in this manner would be extremely time-consuming. A more complicated process is necessary for Chinese fonts; first, the appropriate font must be selected and enabled from a number of options available. Second, the Chinese word is typed phonetically in English and a list of possible Chinese characters appears, each phonetically similar when written in English but varying in relation to the tone of the utterance and its context. The correct character must be chosen from this list. It was clear that this process was restrictively difficult for untrained staff, and so a decision was made to produce hand-made questionnaires which were subsequently scanned into electronic form. Future work may benefit from the production

of questionnaires typed using the appropriate fonts by a professional agency or by someone more familiar with the appropriate software.

## **9 The Future**

As stated above, the developed questionnaires require further proofreading to ensure accuracy and consistency of spelling before widespread use. In addition, the current questionnaires should be professionally typeset.

Having gained experience in the methods required to ensure cross-cultural acceptability and validity of tobacco-related questions, subsequent work could expand the existing questionnaire to focus on other health-related behaviours and include attitudinal questions and demographic data. Insights gained from this project will be transferable to other areas of health research.

In the immediate future we have the intention to seek further funding to conduct studies of criterion validity and reliability on the four questionnaires. This work will also incorporate formatting of the questionnaire and the production of a culturally appropriate introduction to each language version. It is hoped that this project will begin early in 2005.