A cross-sectional study into the UK public's awareness of obesity as an aetiological factor for multiple cancers

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INTRODUCTION

Cancer Research UK (CRUK) have predicted, obesity will eventually overtake smoking as the biggest cause of cancer hence, there is a need to ascertain if the public are aware of the associated risk.

Previous public health campaigns like CRUK's smoking campaign have proven to be very effective in not only changing behaviours, but reducing incidence rates. In 2018 CRUK initiated an obesity campaign, it is vital to assess the success and usefulness of this campaign, to indicate how future health promotion can be improved.

OB_S__Y is a cause of cancer

CANCER RESEARCH UK

OBJECTIVES

➢ To identify levels of public awareness of obesity as a cancer risk factor in comparison to other risk factors
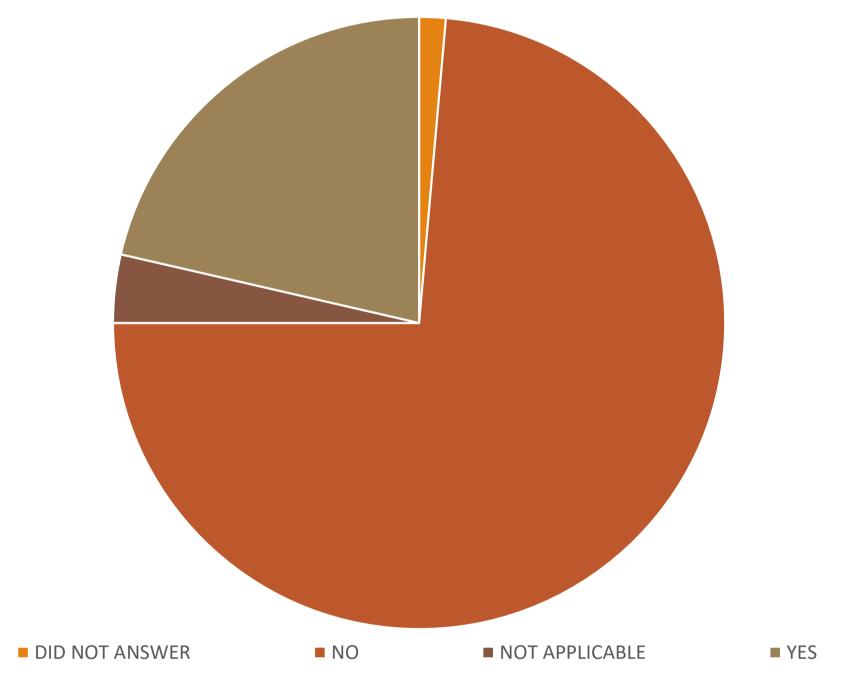
➢ To assess the effectiveness of the Cancer Research's 'Reduce the Risk' campaign and make recommendations for future health promotion

METHODS

➢ The project utilised an online questionnaire that was distributed using a snowballing technique to create an exponential non-discriminative sample

➢ The sample consisted of members of the UK public with varying demographics. Those under the age of 18 were omitted from partaking in the study due to the issues in gaining informed consent as outlined by The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2014). The wide inclusion criteria enabled the results to demonstrate a true representation of the cancer aetiology awareness levels of the UK public as a whole.

➢ Qualitative and quantitative data were collected and subsequently analysed using IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and Braun et al's (2006) thematic analysis[1].

RESULTS

➢ Majority of the sample consisted of those aged between 18-28 years.

➢ The most commonly identified aetiological factor was smoking closely followed by sun/ UV exposure. Mobile Phone usage and drinking coffee were the least identified risk factors.

➢ The results also demonstrated the general public have multiple definitions for obesity.

➢ Diabetes was the most disease most associated with obesity and 55% more of the respondents identified diabetes than cancer.

➢ 73.6% of the respondents were not able to recall any cancer related campaigns. Of the 21.4% of participants that remembered a cancer related campaign, 53% could not give any details about what they had seen.

Figure 6.Obesity Related Campaigns

■ DID NOT ANSWER ■ NO ■ NOT APPLICABLE ■ YES

DISCUSSION

➢ The success of the CRUK Smoking awareness campaigns is shown as it was the most recognised cancer aetiology, despite this study being conducted within a year of the CRUK 2018 obesity campaign.

➢ Dual efforts between the UK Government and various charities is fundamental for health promotion and may have been a contributing factor for the limited success of CRUK 2018 campaign[2].

CONCLUSION

➢ This study affirmed the capability and impact of public health campaigns, but the CRUK 2018 obesity campaign was unsuccessful in informing a large proportion of the UK population,

➢ Memorability and efficiency of health promotion campaigns is dependent on campaigns being run for a long duration and targeting a wide demographic.

➢ Future health promotion will need to focus on over coming misconceptions and stereotypes engraved in society to facilitate public health education.

1. Braun, V. and Clarke, V. 2006. Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology.*3(2). Pp.77-101
2. Estacio, E. Oliver, M. et al. 2017. Effective Partnership in Community-Based Health Promotion: Lessons from the Health Literacy Partnership. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health.* 14(12). pp.1550-1551

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