

Positive media campaigns help minorities put down cigarettes

April 29 2011, By Glenda Fauntleroy

While African-American smokers are less likely to receive quitting advice from their doctors or use quit aids, media campaigns that offer positive encouragement can have an impact on getting them to quit, finds a new study.

Past research has shown that [mass media smoking cessation](#) campaigns have been less effective among African-American and Hispanic smokers as well as those in low income groups compared to smokers who are better off — despite the fact that this group is most in need of help.

“It was absolutely critical that we develop a campaign that would resonate with lower education and lower income smokers,” said lead author Donna Vallone of the American Legacy Foundation, in Washington. “These individuals not only smoke at higher rates and quit at lower rates, they also have worse long term outcomes from tobacco-related disease.”

In the study, appearing in the May/June issue of the *American Journal of Health Promotion*, Vallone and her colleagues surveyed 4,067 current adult smokers before and six months after the launch of the national “EX campaign” in August 2008. The EX ads featured diverse characters and were promoted on television, the Internet and radio. The tone of the message was sympathetic and encouraged [smokers](#) to “relearn” life without cigarettes.

“There is some evidence to suggest that health communication messages

which use positive frames may be more effective among African-American audiences,” Vallone said. “The EX message could certainly be characterized as positive.”

Results showed African-Americans who were aware of the EX campaign had a threefold increase in making a quit attempt during the campaign period. Participants with less than a high school education doubled their odds of trying to quit.

Alonza Robertson, chief strategist for Consigliere Emerging Media in New York, agreed positive health messages have more impact on changing minorities’ behavior.

“In aiming messages at minority communities, the campaign must all be respectful of language, cultural beliefs and literacy levels,” he said. “And to influence behavioral change and outcome, it’s better to focus on influencing the consumer’s future about what he can do than criticizing and marginalizing about what he cannot.”

More information: Vallone DM, et al. A national mass media smoking cessation campaign: effects by race/ethnicity and education. *Am J Health Promo* 25(5s), 2011.

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