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BRIEF COMMUNICATION

Cigarette smoking might impair memory and sleep quality

Jui-Ting Liu [a], I-Hui Lee [b,c], Chieh-Hui Wang [a,d], Kao-Chin Chen [b,c,e,*], Chien-I Lee [a,d], Yen-Kuang Yang [b,c]

[a] Department of Psychiatry, Changhua Christian Hospital Lutung Branch, Changhua 50550, Taiwan
[b] Department of Psychiatry, National Cheng Kung University Hospital, College of Medicine, National Cheng Kung University, Tainan 704, Taiwan
[c] Addiction Research Center, National Cheng Kung University, Tainan 704, Taiwan
[d] Department of Psychiatry, Changhua Christian Hospital, Changhua 500, Taiwan
[e] Department of Psychiatry, National Cheng Kung University Hospital, Douliou Branch, Yunlin 640, Taiwan

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Although nicotine can enhance some cognitive functions, cigarette smoking may impair memory and sleep quality. Our aim was to investigate the impact of cigarette smoking on memory and sleep quality in healthy smokers. Sixty-eight healthy participants (34 smokers and 34 controls) completed the Wechsler Memory Scale-Revised and a Chinese version of the Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index. The Wilcoxon signed ranks test was performed, and Hochberg's Sharpened Bonferroni correction was applied for multiple comparisons. The results show that current smokers had a worse visual memory compared to nonsmokers. There was no significant correlation between the index of Wechsler Memory Scale-Revised and Fagerström test for nicotine dependence. Moreover, smokers had poorer sleep quality. Cigarette smoking might impair memory and adversely influence sleep quality.
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Introduction

While cigarette smoking is a serious health hazard to the brain,[1] data showed that nicotine enhances some cognitive functions, such as finger tapping, focused and sustained attention, recognition memory, and reasoning in nonsmokers and non-deprived smokers.[2,3] However, cigarette smoke contains more substances aside from nicotine; considering

* Corresponding author. Department of Psychiatry, National Cheng Kung University and Hospital, 138 Sheng Li Road, Tainan 704, Taiwan.
E-mail address: andchen@mail.ncku.edu.tw (K.-C. Chen).

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its complex constituents, we question the influence of long-term smoking on cognitive functions. Studies have assumed that cigarette smoking is adversely associated with cognitive functioning, fine motor speed, flexibility, memory, and sleep quality.[4–7] The possible mechanism may be due to the toxic effects of cigarette smoke components, including oxidative stress, inflammation, and atherosclerosis, to the human brain and cardiovascular system. However, few studies have explored the impact of long-term cigarette smoking regarding memory and sleep in Asian population. The aim of this study was to investigate the influence of cigarette smoking on memory and sleep quality in healthy Taiwanese smokers.

Methods

Participants

A total of 68 healthy participants (34 smokers and 34 controls) were recruited in various community studies through research advertisements. A smoker was defined as a person who smoked at least 1 cigarette per day for successive 12 months. The healthy controls and smokers were matched for age, gender, and educational level. Informed consent was obtained from all study participants. The study protocols were approved by the Ethical Committee for Human Research in the National Cheng Kung University Hospital. The smokers were allowed to smoke whenever they had the urge during the assessments. At the beginning of each session, the level of carbon monoxide (CO) that smokers exhaled was measured which is significantly correlated with the plasma nicotine level.[8] They also completed the Fagerström test for nicotine dependence (FTND) and a smoking history questionnaire. The results of nicotine-related assessments were used as demographics for describing our sample of smokers.

The exclusion criteria for smokers were as follows: (1) taking any medication within the past 3 months; and (2) presence of any physical and/or mental illnesses, including alcohol or illegal substances abuse/dependence. Aside from a physical examination, all participants were interviewed by a senior psychiatrist using the Chinese version of the Mini International Neuropsychiatry Interview.[9] All participants had normal brain MRI results, and they also underwent a comprehensive physical examination.

Assessments

Wechsler Memory Scale-Revised

The Wechsler Memory Scale-Revised (WMS-R)[10] was administered by a trained psychologist (who had a master's degree) to measure the visual memory index, verbal memory index, general memory index, delayed-recall memory index, and attention/concentration index. The mean score and standard deviation (SD) for the WMS-R in the general population are 100 and 15, respectively, and cross-validation of this test has been confirmed in previous research.[11]

Chinese version of the Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index

The Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index (PSQI) is a self-administered questionnaire to evaluate subjective sleep quality during the previous month.[12] It contains 19 self-rated questions, yielding a total score and seven subscore components: subjective sleep quality, sleep latency, sleep duration, sleep efficiency, sleep disturbance, use of sleep medication, and daytime dysfunction. Each subscore component is scored from 0 to 3, yielding a total PSQI score between 0 and 21, with higher scores indicating a poorer quality of sleep. A PSQI total score greater than 5 indicates "poor sleep" with a sensitivity of 89.6—98.7% and a specificity of 84.4—86.5%.[12,13] The cut-off score of the Chinese version of PSQI is 5, which has a sensitivity of 98% and a specificity of 55%.[14] It is a reliable and valid tool for the assessment of sleep quality.[12,14]

Statistical analysis

Since the scores of some WMS-R indexes and PSQI were not normally distributed, Wilcoxon signed ranks test and Spearman's rho correlation were performed. Hochberg's sharpened Bonferroni correction was used for multiple comparisons. The threshold for statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$. SPSS version17 (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL, USA) was used for all analyses.

Results

The mean age was 31.9 years (SD = 8.4) for smokers and 32.0 years (SD = 8.4) for nonsmokers, and the mean duration of cigarette smoking was 10.6 years (SD = 6.9). No significant difference in terms of years of education was found between smokers and nonsmokers (Wilcoxon signed ranks test = −0.11, $p = 0.92$). The demographic data of the groups are shown in Table 1. Compared to controls, smokers had significantly poorer visual memory (Wilcoxon signed ranks test = −2.21, $p = 0.03$) and sleep (Wilcoxon signed ranks test = −2.04, $p = 0.04$). There was no correlation between the results of WMS-R and FTND ($p > 0.28$).

Discussion

In this study, we found that long-term cigarette smoking might impair the visual memory. It is known that nicotine can activate the release of dopamine, which improves the cognitive performance. In addition, nicotine also increases the strength of synaptic connections in the hippocampus which supports the enhancement of short-term memory. Nicotine can dose-dependently improve recognition memory, as well as decrease response time and increase the number of fast reaction times in cognitive tasks among nonsmokers.[15] It can also enhance cognitive functions such as finger tapping and focused and sustained attention in both nonsmokers and non-deprived smokers.[2,16]

However, cigarette smoke also contains other components besides nicotine, and at least 4700 other constituents of cigarette smoke have been identified. Many components of cigarette smoke have been confirmed to be toxic to the human brain and cardiovascular system. Such compounds include vinyl chloride, hydrogen cyanide, arsenic, lead, and carbon monoxide. Cigarette smoking can damage the endothelium and thereby cause atherosclerosis[17] and

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