

Potential barriers to cancer prevention and uptake of services among UK born Irish people

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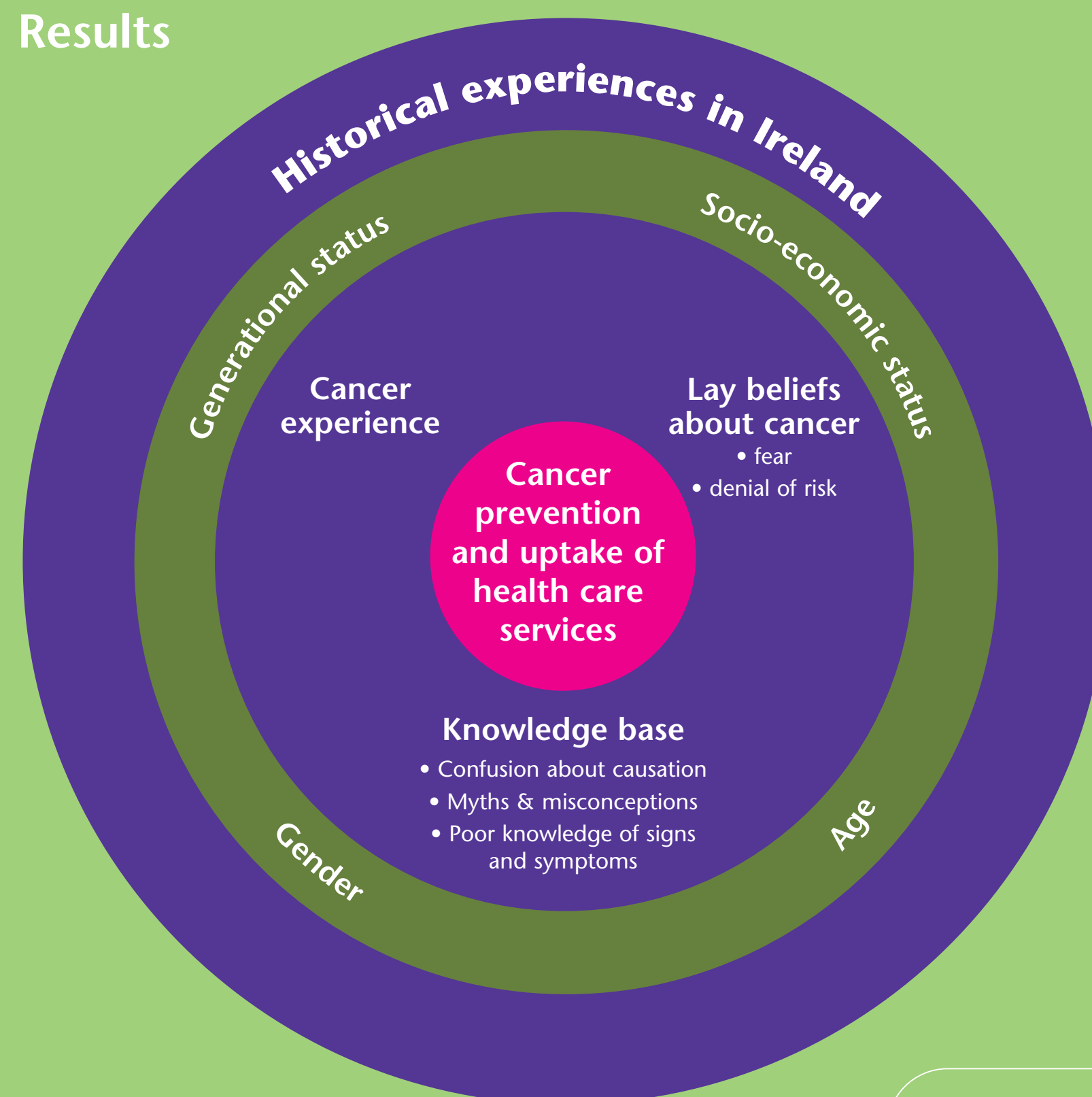
Introduction

Overall mortality of first and second generation Irish people is more than 20% higher than the national average, mainly attributable to excess cancer mortality.^{1,2,3,4} High cancer incidence has also been observed in the second generation (UK-born Irish at about 20% higher than that of all other people in England and Wales⁵). The cause of these differences is not known. Socio-economic status and behavioural factors are implicated, but do not account for all of the excess^{6,7}. Very little is known about cancer related knowledge, beliefs and attitudes among Irish people in Britain, and this is the first study to investigate these issues.

Method

Twenty-five focus groups (13 Irish, 12 White British) and thirty-two individual interviews (16 in each ethnic group) were conducted in London, Manchester and Glasgow between September 2002 and March 2003. The sample was purposively selected to ensure a diverse range of demographic characteristics (age, gender, socio-economic status, and generational status for the Irish sample) and cancer experience. The final sample comprised of 115 participants, 58 Irish and 57 White British participants.

Results



A second generation Irish male stated that

"The Irish have this weird you know, they keep everything to themselves. Macho's not a word that I strike with the Irish, they've got this hard image. Going to the doctor's for softies...I would say the Irish, particularly men are incredibly macho. They don't talk about stuff like that in general."

(G.INT.IR71. 2ndG.M.50y.D.FC)

An Irish female described how

"I think my father's family...they all worked manually in the docks years ago and four of them died with cancer and I'm sure it was something to do with the kind of work they did."

(L.INT.IR68.1stG.F.60y.A.SC)

An Irish female stated that

"I also think that the older people of my generation might not have had the same healthcare earlier on in life....Poorer medical conditions, poorer environmental conditions...probably not a certain amount of awareness of caring for yourself."

(M.INT.IR26.1stG.F.63y.A.SC)

A second generation Irish female stated that

"You'll find with Irish people, its just taboo, the whole thing...it was an embarrassment... I think it's the way they've been brought up....Life was very hard for them, you didn't complain about anything"

M.INT.IR63.2ndG.F.48y.A.FC)

Policy implications

- More inclusive and targeted cancer awareness campaigns are needed
- Remove barriers to accessing health care services, such as targeting delays in help-seeking and improving communication with health professionals.

Key Messages

- Poor cancer knowledge base and pessimistic attitude toward prevention and treatment of cancers, irrespective of ethnicity, age, gender, and socio-economic status and generational status of the Irish
- The differences in cancer health beliefs between the Irish and White British were related to specific historical, social and economic circumstances

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