



The effect of media influence on smoking susceptibility in adolescents: a study of the college students of Ambala District

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Because children have high levels of exposure, media have greater access and time to shape young people's attitudes and actions than do parents or teachers, replacing them as educators, role models, and the primary sources of information about the world and how one behaves in it.¹

— American Academy of Pediatrics Council on Communications and Media

Abstract

MEDIA has time and again proved itself as the double edged sword that is important both for health education as well as the stimulation of unhealthy behavior. The objective of this study was to explore the role of media in promoting cigarette smoking habit among the college students in district Ambala of Haryana. A descriptive, exploratory research study was conducted among 200 adolescent students by using questionnaire method in 5 randomly selected colleges of Ambala district of Haryana. The students were told that their identity will not be revealed. Data were analyzed to find out a relation between cigarette smoking status and media related variables like reading fashion magazine, watching videos that include smoking visuals, listening to audio that promotes smoking, watching movies in cinema hall or television, and desire to smoke if favourite artist smokes. Different forms of media including cinema, music, magazines, television, are found to be important predictors for smoking status of college students in Ambala district.

Keywords

Adolescents, Cigarettes, Smoking, Media, Provocation.

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I. Introduction:

The tobacco epidemic is one of the biggest public health threats the world has ever faced, killing more than 8 million people a year, including around 1.2 million deaths from exposure to second-hand smoke.

All forms of tobacco are harmful, and there is no safe level of exposure to tobacco. Cigarette smoking is the most common form of tobacco use worldwide. Other tobacco products include waterpipe tobacco, various smokeless tobacco products, cigars, cigarillos, roll-your-own tobacco, pipe tobacco, bidis and kreteks. Over 80% of the 1.3 billion tobacco users worldwide live in low- and middle-income countries, where the burden of tobacco-related illness and death is heaviest. Tobacco use contributes to poverty by diverting household spending from basic needs such as food and shelter to tobacco. The economic costs of tobacco use are substantial and include significant health care costs for treating the diseases caused by tobacco use as well as the lost human capital that results from tobacco-attributable morbidity and mortality.

According to World Health Organization (WHO), tobacco is the single largest preventable risk factor for various diseases including premature deaths and disability around the world. It kills nearly six million people

1 American Academy of Pediatrics Council on Communications and Media. (2009). Policy Statement Media Violence. *Pediatrics*, 124(5), 1495-1503. <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/124/5/1495.full.pdf>

each year of which more than five million are users and ex-users and more than 600,000 are nonsmokers exposed to second-hand smoke².

Much of the social psychological research regarding cigarette smoking use and adolescents focuses on social influences, with an emphasis on the role of societal factors, peer groups, and social norms. A developing and persuasive body of research focuses on the effect of media and targeted propaganda of tobacco companies on youth smoking. Although the relationship of knowledge and social influence concerning smoking among adolescents is well documented, the relationship between media and youth susceptibility to initiating smoking merits further exploration.

Several studies have highlighted this fact that media often promotes substance abuse. Schill (2011) states that the social media sites encourage negative behaviors for teen students such as procrastination (catching up with friends), and they are more likely to drink and drug.³

There are several factors that increase the risk of youth smoking. Availability, accessibility and affordability, pressure from peer or siblings; having a lower self-image than peers, perceiving that tobacco use is normal or “cool” and parental smoking are important risk factors associated with youth smoking.⁴

The academicians as well as researchers have time and again pointed out that ...“Advertising and promotional activities are considered to influence key risk factors for tobacco use among adolescents.”⁵

Similarly, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration’s 1995 review of available tobacco industry documents highlighted that cigarette manufacturers know that young people are vital for their market, so they need to develop advertising and other promotional activities that appeal to young people.⁶

Sargent, J.D., Gibson, J. and Heatherton, T.F too have agreed that there are separate roles for entertainment media and tobacco marketing on adolescents’ smoking.⁷

DuRant examined the content of tobacco and alcohol use behaviors on television and found out that a high percentage (26%) of MTV videos portrayed tobacco use. The same study found that, given the influence of modeling and imitation in young people, videos that portrayed alcohol and tobacco use depicted the lead performer as most often the one observed to be smoking or drinking.⁸

A study done in 2010 in India showed that smoking was more common among men who watched television daily compared to those who never watched television and among those who attended the cinema monthly compared to those who did not.⁹

Several studies have examined the effect of movies or movie clips with smoking on attitudes and cognitions in adolescents and young adults. The results indicate that even brief exposures to movie smoking can influence beliefs and cognitions about smoking among actors, smoking in other people, and also personal pro-smoking intentions. Pechman and Shih (1999) showed adolescents scenes from the movie *Reality Bites*; the control group saw the same film, but with smoking scenes edited out. Adolescents who saw smoking scenes attributed higher social status to adolescent smokers generally and also reported increased personal intentions to smoke. Interestingly, the effect of showing the entire movie on personal intentions was blunted by showing an

² WHO (2013) Tobacco. <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs339/en/>

³ Schill, R. (2011). *Social Networking Teens More Likely to Drink, Use Drugs, Study Finds*. Retrieved from: <http://jjie.org/teens-on-facebook-more-likely-drink-or-use-drugs-study-finds/20713>

⁴ Braverman, M.T. and Aarø, L.E. (2004) Adolescent Smoking and Exposure to Tobacco Marketing Under a Tobacco Advertising Ban: Findings from 2 Norwegian National Samples. *American Journal of Public Health*, **94**, 1230-1238. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.94.7.1230>

⁵ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (1994): A Report of Preventing Tobacco Use among Young People.

⁶ US Food Drug Administration (1995) Regulations Restricting the Sale and Distribution of Cigarettes and smokeless Tobacco Products to Protect Children and Adolescents. US Department of Health and Human Services, Washington DC

⁷ Sargent, J.D., Gibson, J. and Heatherton, T.F. (2009) Comparing the Effects of Entertainment Media and Tobacco Marketing on Youth Smoking. *Tobacco Control*, **18**, 47-53. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/tc.2008.026153>

⁸ DuRant, R.H., Rome, E.S., Rich, M., Allred, E., Emans, S.J., Woods, E.R., *et al.* (1997) Tobacco and Alcohol Use Behaviors Portrayed in Music Videos: A Content Analysis. *American Journal of Public Health*, **87**, 1131-1135. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.87.7.1131>

⁹ Vishownath, K., Ackerson, L.K., Sorensen, G. and Gupta, P.C. (2010) Movies and TV Influence Tobacco Use in India: Findings from a National Survey. *PLoS ONE*, **5**, e11365.

antismoking advertisement prior to viewing the movie. These findings need to be replicated, but they provide the basis for urging movie makers to include antismoking ads on DVDs for movies that contain smoking.¹⁰

Dal Cin and colleagues (Dal Cin, Gibson, Zanna, Shumate, & Fong, 2007) recently published a theoretically important manuscript based on *transportation theory*, the idea that viewers are affected by stories because of their identification with the storyline and characters. They looked at implicit associations between self and smoking as a function of identification with a smoking protagonist and found that greater identification predicted stronger associations between the self and smoking (for both smokers and nonsmokers) and increased intentions to smoke (among the smokers). In addition, stronger implicit associations between the self and smoking uniquely predicted increases in smokers' intentions to smoke. Taken together, the experimental research published to date adds support to epidemiologic studies.¹¹

II. Methodology

This descriptive, exploratory research study drew a random sample (N=200) of male college students, who smoke. After gaining informed consent, they were administered a student perception questionnaire on how media affects college students when it comes to smoking. The students were selected from 5 randomly selected colleges of Ambala district of Haryana in the months of February-March 2021. They were told that their identity will not be revealed. Data was analyzed to find out a relation between cigarette smoking status and media related variables like reading fashion magazine, watching videos that include smoking visuals, listening to audio that promotes smoking, watching movies in cinema hall or television, and desire to smoke if favorite artist smokes. Different forms of media including cinema, music, magazines, television, are found to be important predictors for smoking status of college students in Ambala district.

Limitations:

This study was limited in several aspects. First, the timeframe to collect data was too short. Second, a total of 200 questionnaires were administered, however usable questionnaires were 192, so the result may not reflect the real situation for the whole population. Last but not the least, only male students were included in the sample.

III. Results

Sixty percent of subjects were occasional smokers, 30 % admitted that they were habitual smokers while 10 % agreed that they are experimental smokers. Eight percent of them started smoking at an early age i.e. when they were in their Matriculation class or even before that, 32% said that they started smoking after passing 10th standard but before their 10+2 was over.

Sixty percent respondents told that they started smoking after joining their college which clearly indicates that youngsters start smoking mainly during their college days.

When asked about their primary reason behind smoking, 58% said that they started it because of some close friend, 5% said that they had a such a family atmosphere at home which attracted them towards smoking i.e. smoking was common in their families while an alarming 33% agreed that their exposure to media such as films, songs, magazines, television programs and advertising attracted them towards smoking.

¹⁰ Pechmann C, Shih CF. Smoking scenes in movies and antismoking advertisements before movies: Effects on youth. *Journal of Marketing*. 1999; 63:1–13.

¹¹ Dal Cin S, Gibson B, Zanna MP, Shumate R, Fong GT: Smoking in movies, implicit associations of smoking with the self, and intentions to smoke. *Psychol Sci*. 2007 Jul; 18(7):559-63.

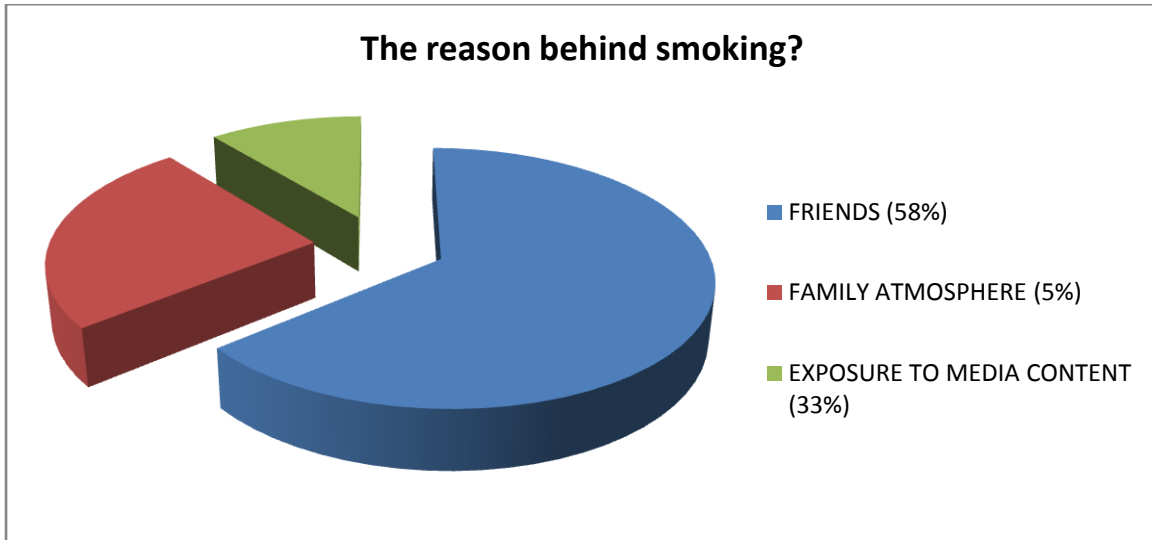


Fig. 1

Twenty percents of the respondents told that they smoke in order to release their tension, 72% said that they do so in order to enhance their masculine appeal while 8% said that they had their own personal reasons for smoking e.g. to have fun or to have a feel. Interestingly, 67% of them imitate the smoking style of some particular celebrity while 33% of them do it in their own style. When asked how many of them have tried to quit smoking 27% answered in affirmative. Out of them 84% were unsuccessful in quitting it. 42% respondents told that their friends made them smoke again while 48% agreed that various media messages forced them to ‘think’ about it again.

Further, 87% of the subjects agreed that media content promotes smoking, 10% said that they don’t know exactly about it and 3% gave a negative reply.

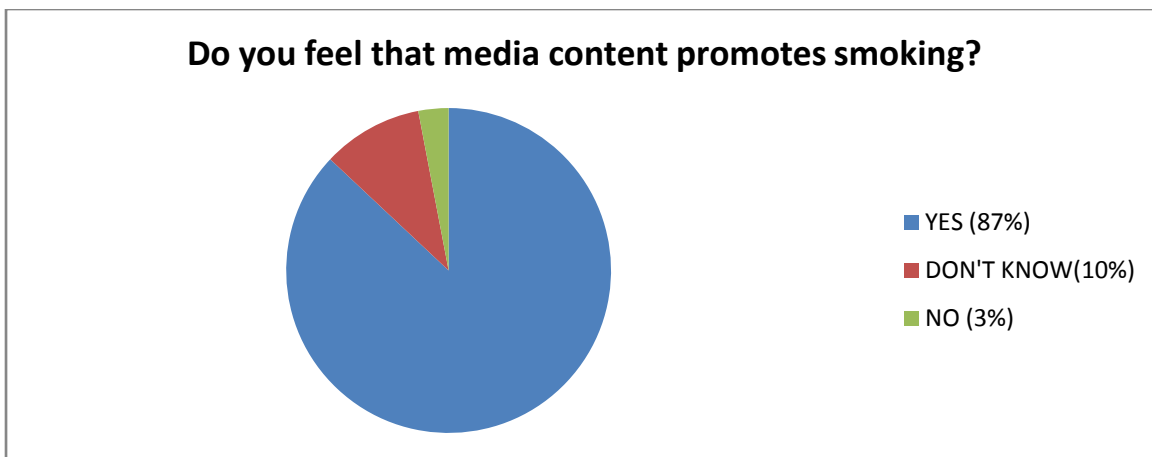


Fig. 2

Last but not the least 96% of the respondents agreed that their desire to smoke increases whenever they saw someone smoking on television or in a film or in a fashion magazine.

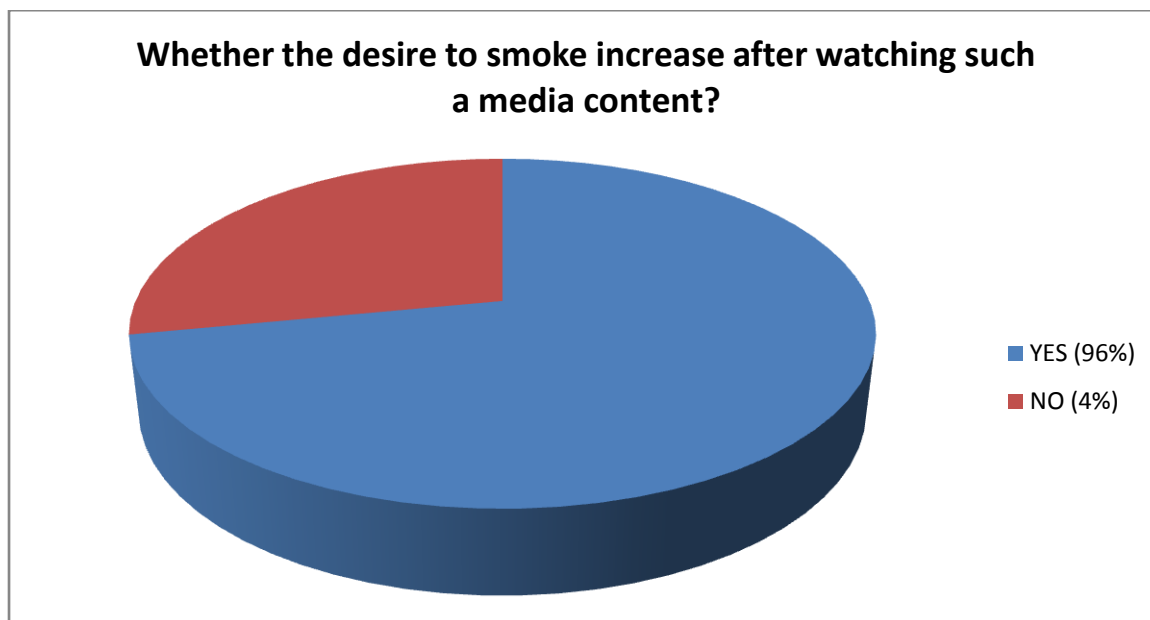


Fig. 3

IV. Conclusion:

Thus the study concludes on a note that there is a very strong relation between cigarette smoking status and media related variables like reading fashion magazine, watching videos that include smoking visuals, listening to audio that promotes smoking, watching movies in cinema hall or television, and desire to smoke if favorite artist smokes. Different forms of media including cinema, music, magazines, television, are found to be important predictors for smoking status of college students. Widespread concern exists about the potential effects that media portrayals of substance abuse like smoking may have on youth throughout the world. Television, radio, film, and popular music are often identified as potential sources through which young people learn about it. The take-home message is that eliminating smoking in movies may prevent a substantial number of adolescents from smoking.

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