

Rating might be unlikely to affect teens exposure to smoking in movies

Several recent research studies published in the United States have determined that young adolescents who see smoking scenes in movies are more likely to smoke. To combat smoking among youth, public health groups have called for Restricted (R) ratings for movies that depict smoking. A new study from New Zealand, however, calls that strategy into question, noting that the R rating may not have the intended effect of putting such movies “out of reach” of children.

“Significantly, we found that 94 percent of the 14 to 15 year olds in our sample watched R-rated movies, and 38.5 percent did so on a weekly basis. Therefore, limiting smoking to R-rated movies will likely not eliminate the influence of smoking in the movies,” said Joseph R. DiFranza, MD, professor of family medicine & community health at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, who conducted the study with colleagues from New Zealand.

The study, published in *Preventive Medicine*, was conducted to follow up on previous reports from the U.S. that demonstrated an increased risk of smoking among youth who watched movies that depict smoking. Almost all of the movies screened in New Zealand come from the U.S. The New Zealanders conducted surveys of 88,505 high school students of largely European, Maori, Asian or Pacific Islander ethnicity. They asked students how often they watched R-rated movies and also about their intention to smoke, past experiences with smoking and their current smoking habits.

The more often youths watched R-rated films the more likely they were to smoke, or to have intentions to smoke in the future if they hadn’t already started. Those who watched the most R-rated films were twice as likely to have tried smoking as youths who never watched them. Among the nonsmokers, those who watched the most R-rated movies were nearly three times as likely to be susceptible to starting to smoke, even when the researchers controlled for age, gender, ethnicity, peer smoking, parental smoking, socioeconomic status, pocket money and household smoking rules.

“The good example parents set by not smoking and forbidding smoking in the home can be trumped by the glamorization of smoking in the movies. The U.S. movie industry contributes to the spread of teen smoking around the globe, rivaling the influence of the tobacco industry,” said co-author Dr. Joseph DiFranza.

Source: University of Massachusetts

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