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# Predicting the onset of smoking in boys and girls

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## Abstract

The problem of the high prevalence of smoking among girls and young women is of great concern. In an attempt to identify the factors which influence girls and boys respectively to attempt smoking, the study examines social background, advertising and brand awareness, knowledge, teaching and personal beliefs in conjunction as predictors of smoking.

In this study which involved the administration of identical pre- and post-test questionnaires to a sample of boys and girls aged 12 and 13 years, nine variables expressed by never-smokers at pre-test stage were assessed as predictors of immediate future smoking. The two tests were administered 4 months apart to 1125 boys and 1213 girls in northern England. The nine variables included were parental smoking, correct friends' smoking, perceived positive values of smoking, perceived negative values of smoking, correct health knowledge, cigarette-brand awareness, having a favourite cigarette advertisement, having a cigarette-brand sponsored sport in four top favourites

on television. One group received teaching about smoking between the pre- and post-tests and this was also included as a variable.

For boys, no variable investigated had any consistently statistically significant correlation with the uptake of smoking. The most important predictor of smoking for boys, having a best friend who smoked, was significant on application of the  $\chi^2$  test ( $P0.037$ , although it was non-significant when included singly in a logistic regression model (0.094); the discrepancy was probably due to the small number of best friends known to smoke.

For girls, four variables were found to be significant predictors of smoking when included singly in a logistic regression. In order of significance they were: having at least one parent who smoked ( $P0.002$ ), having positive views on smoking ( $P0.007$ ), cigarette-brand awareness ( $P0.02$ ), and a best friend who smoked ( $P0.03$ ). In a step forward logistic regression involving all nine variables, the most important predictors for girls were: having at least one parent who smoked ( $P0.002$ ), having positive views on smoking ( $P0.009$ ), having a best friend who smoked ( $P0.027$ ).

Perceived positive values was the least important predictor of smoking in boys. For both boys and girls teaching about smoking between pre- and post-tests was non-significant.

The findings indicate a different relative balance of predictors of smoking in boys and girls respectively and suggest that without a social approach which takes these various influences into account, education about smoking in schools might expect to achieve less than it should.



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## Keywords

girls; smoking; onset; predictors

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