

Cinema intervention study:
A brief intervention to reduce smoking among young people

SUMMARY

December 1, 2004

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Introduction

Smoking imagery in movies, such as smoking by characters and tobacco product placement consistently portrays smoking as positive through associating it with benefits such as relaxation and good looks.

Research indicates that among youth tobacco imagery in films:

- Is often perceived as credible
- Is associated with higher receptivity to smoking by nonsmokers
- Is associated with higher susceptibility to smoking
- Appears to influence smoking-related attitudes such as perceptions of normalcy; likelihood of smoking in the future; and the attractiveness of smokers.

Placing adult only ratings on films that glamourise smoking is a possible policy solution to this issue. Because policy change is a long and complex process, intermediate interventions are required to combat the effects of this positive smoking imagery. A simple option is screening an anti-smoking advertisement before the film that contains a lot of smoking imagery. This intervention is a low cost method, which aims to disrupt the pervasive and unchallenged smoking imagery in films and deflate the perceived credibility. This study was designed to assess the feasibility and short term impact of screening an anti-smoking advertisement before films that contain a lot of smoking imagery.

What we did:

- We screened a previously developed anti-smoking advertisement before the film 'Wimbledon,' which was targeted at 12-17 year olds and contained pro-smoking images. The advertisement contained visual health messages about the damage smoking does to your lungs and an Australian cress' voiceover that described how most actors do not smoke and that smoking prevalence is exaggerated in film.
- Regular cinema patrons that saw the movie and were aged between 12 and 17 years were surveyed. The participants were recruited into either an intervention group (viewed advertisement) or control group (did not view advertisement). The participants were surveyed about the appeal of the advertisement, incidence of smoking in the film, attitudes and beliefs regarding smoking in films, and questions about their own smoking behaviors.

What we found:

- Results indicate that the intervention was feasible if support was given by the cinema and advertising provider.
- Overall, the majority of participants in the intervention group recalled seeing the anti-smoking advertisement. The majority of the sample also recalled the advertisement message and thought that the advertisement was either “average” or “very good”.
- The intervention had no direct, immediate impact on reducing smoking intentions, but a decrease in the acceptability of on-screen smoking was observed for the intervention group, compared to the control group. The intervention group also perceived smoking in film to be more pervasive than the control group.
- People who had ever smoked were more likely to perceive smoking in film to be acceptable and more pervasive in film when compared to people who had never smoked.

What we recommend:

- An anti-smoking advertisement intervention in cinemas is introduced as part of a broader, comprehensive tobacco control programme. It would be a cost-effective awareness-raising intervention.
- Future tobacco control mass media campaigns should include cinema advertising as part of an overall media strategy
- Future campaigns targeted at the younger population screen a ‘hard-hitting’ advertisement that focuses on the ‘immediate’ damage, similar to the advertisement that was used, rather than focusing on longer-term effects. The advertisement was found to have high recall among the young people sampled in this study.
- Further investigation into the effect of the ‘voice-over’ over and above the independent effect of the advertisement is done. The impact of the ‘voice-over’ may have the effect of drawing attention to the pervasiveness of smoking in film.
- Efforts are taken to mitigate the perceived pervasiveness and acceptability of smoking in the media in order to reduce the incidence of smoking initiation among adolescents.
- Interventions are implemented that educate young people about the prevalence of and reasons for smoking in movies because young people perceive smoking as both pervasive and acceptable in films.