

Positive school environments can help reduce student smoking

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A survey of high-school children in Scotland has shown that pupils who experience positive and inclusive social environments in schools are less likely to take up smoking. New research published in the open access journal *BMC Public Health* reveals that teachers who succeed in creating a positive environment in school may be responsible for their pupils staying smoke-free.

Marion Henderson of the Medical Research Council Social and Public Health Sciences Unit, Glasgow, led the study of 5092 pupils from 24 Scottish schools. She explains "The social environment of schools, in particular the quality of teacher-pupil relationships, pupil's attitude to school and the school's focus on caring and inclusiveness, all influence both boys' and girls' smoking habits".

This research is especially important because the decreases in adult smoking seen in recent years have not, as yet, been matched in adolescent smokers. Dr. Henderson and colleagues found that, on average, 25% of males and 39% of females aged 15-16, reported that they either regularly or occasionally smoked. Henderson describes how current school-based anti-smoking interventions are largely ineffective "Most focus on individual characteristics rather than the environment in which adolescents smoke. Our research has shown that this environment acts to either encourage or discourage smoking".

'School effects' refer to school-level variations in smoking that remain once other individual influences have been taken into account, such as

whether pupils smoke before joining, whether they live with both parents and their amount of personal spending money. The research team found there were clear school effects that could be explained by pupils' attitudes towards school, quality of teacher-pupil relationships and school-level affluence.

Henderson says: "Our results suggest that investing in the social environment of schools and endeavouring to make school a positive experience even for less academically able pupils may have the potential to reduce smoking rates, particularly for boys. This provides some of the strongest evidence to date to support the Health Promoting School concept, and for the first time looks at how this differs by gender."

Source: BioMed Central

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