

Nursing students twice as likely to smoke as the general population

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Public health experts are calling for urgent steps to reduce the number of healthcare professionals who smoke, after a survey of over 800 new nursing students found that more than half were current or former smokers.

The Italian study, published in the January issue of the *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, surveyed 812 students who were just starting their University course. They found that 44% of them were still smoking - twice as many as in the general population - and a further 12% were former smokers.

Three-quarters of the smoking students had at least one parent who smoked and almost half had at least one brother or sister who smoked.

"[Smoking prevention](#) is an important issue and healthcare professionals, especially physicians and nurses, can play a major role in helping people to understand the consequences that smoking can have on their health and their lives" says Professor Anna Maria Tortorano from the Department of Public Health at the University of Milan, Italy.

"However when [health professionals](#) smoke it makes it more difficult for them to encourage patients to stop."

Key findings of the study included:

- 87% of the students agreed to take part in the survey. 63% were female and 85% were native Italians, with the rest coming from developing countries like Peru, Albania and Ecuador.
- The Italian students were much younger than the immigrant students - averaging 23 and 31 respectively for the males and 23 and 28 for the females.
- 39% of the female students and 53% of the male students smoked, giving an overall average of 44%. 37% smoked up to five cigarettes a day and 4% smoked more than 20.
- Students were much more likely to be current or former smokers if their parents smoked. 75% of smokers had a least one smoking parent, compared with 54% of those who had never smoked and 22% came from homes where both parents smoked, compared with 14% of those who had never smoked.
- The smoking habits of the fathers made little difference, with 33% of smokers having just a father who smoked, compared with 31% of non-smokers. However, smokers were twice as likely to have just a mother who smoked (20%) than non-smokers (10%).
- 47% of current and former smokers had siblings who smoked, compared to 25% of those who have never smoked.

"Figures from the World Health Organization show that approximately 35% of men and 22% of women in developed countries are daily [smokers](#), together with 50% of men and 9% of women in developing countries" says Professor Tortorano, who carried out the study with research associate Dr Emanuela Biraghi.

"Figures for the general Italian population show that 22% of people over the age of 14 smoked in 2007.

"However the figure of 44% reported by nursing students who took part in our study is much higher than the 25% observed for medical students at the same University. It is also twice as high as the general Italian population.

"We believe that smoking cessation programmes should be incorporated into nursing studies as high levels of [smoking](#) among healthcare professionals undermine the credibility of non-smoking campaigns aimed at the general public."

More information: Tobacco smoking habits among nursing students and the influence of family and peer smoking behaviour. Biraghi E and Tortorano A M. Journal of Advanced Nursing. 66.1, pp 33-39. (January 2010). [DOI: 10.1111/j.1365-2648.2009.05135.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2648.2009.05135.x)

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