

Self-identified social smokers less likely to try to quit

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(Medical Xpress) -- Self-identified social smokers are less likely to try to quit and to avoid smoking for more than a month, according to a national study in the *American Journal of Public Health* conducted by professors at the University of California, Merced, and UC San Francisco.

In the study, "Social Smoking Among [Young Adults](#): Investigation of Intentions and Attempts to Quit," the researchers compared the cessation efforts of three different definitions of social [smokers](#). The researchers found that how young adults define their smoking plays a role in whether they try to quit and how successful they are at quitting.

"The self-identified social smokers may pose a particular challenge for cessation," UC Merced psychology professor Anna V. Song and UCSF professor Pamela M. Ling wrote in the paper. "These 'social smokers' may not regard themselves as 'real smokers.' The 'social smoker' label may represent an effort to deny or discount the risks associated with smoking."

While the [health consequences](#) of social smoking have not been specifically studied, the professors said light smoking (fewer than 10 cigarettes per day) is associated with increased [cardiovascular risk](#) and an increased risk of cancer, respiratory tract infections, [cataracts](#), impaired fertility and fractures.

Song and Ling looked at people who identify themselves as social smokers but smoke outside of [social situations](#) or smoke alone, as well as

those who limit their smoking to either smoking mainly or entirely with other people.

Social smoking is highly prevalent among young adults. Of the 1,528 young adults between ages 18 and 25 surveyed, 62 percent identified themselves as social smokers or behaved as social smokers.

The study also found that young adults who label themselves as social smokers but also smoke alone are less likely to have intentions to quit or make quit attempts than established smokers. The opposite is true for behavioral social smokers (those who mainly or only smoke with others). These behavioral social smokers are more likely than those who call themselves social smokers to have intentions to quit and attempt quitting for a month or longer.

"Smoking cessation in young adults — particularly among social smokers — is both a challenge and an opportunity," the professors wrote. "Clinicians and researchers need to address the differences between self-identification and behavior as a social smoker to develop more effective smoking cessation strategies tailored to these two distinct groups."

In addition to differences in social smoking indicators, the data also demonstrated racial/ethnic differences in quitting intentions and behaviors. Compared to white young adults, black young adults were significantly more likely to have intentions to quit, but less likely to have made a quit attempt.

The reverse was true for Hispanic young adults. Compared with white young adults, these participants had no difference in intention to quit, but more attempts to quit for one month or longer.

The study offers insight into the way young adults view smoking and

their intentions to quit. The information could be used by public health officials to design anti-smoking campaigns to have the most impact. The study is an example of the campus' commitment to addressing one of society's most challenging health problems.

"I think we tend to forget that [smoking](#) is still the leading preventable cause of death. Including the effects of secondhand smoke, tobacco kills about 400,000 Americans every year and it costs our society hundreds of billions of dollars in medical costs and loss in productivity," Song said. "One way to solve the problem is to recognize that there are different types of smokers out there and we need to develop strategies that will have the most impact for these different groups, including young people who don't consider themselves smokers."

Provided by University of California, Merced

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