

Seeing others smoke encourages young people to smoke more

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Young people who smoke each day light up more cigarettes if they see other young smokers. Anti-smoking campaigns wrongly ignore this implicit effect, says Dutch researcher Zeena Harakeh.

Harakeh investigated what encourages young [smokers](#) aged 16 to 24 to light a cigarette. Her experiments revealed that this group mainly smokes more when in the company of a smoking peer. 'I call this implicit, passive influencing, as it happens without the other person actively offering a cigarette,' explains the [social scientist](#) from Utrecht University. Also young people who communicate with a peer online and see this person smoking will smoke more themselves. 'So the effect is there even when they do not smell the cigarette scent of the other.'

Campaigns

Harakeh discovered that actively offering [cigarettes](#) had less effect on young smokers than was previously thought. 'It would seem that young people find it easier resist the temptation of a peer offering a cigarette than a peer who is smoking,' says Harakeh. Nevertheless she notes that in anti-smoking campaigns young people are mostly warned about the explicit, active influence. Harakeh: 'Prevention programmes completely ignore the passive, implicit influence. More attention should be paid to that.'

Based on her research, Harakeh believes a [smoking ban](#) should be

recommended on school playgrounds. 'That is the very place where hundreds of young people see each other smoke and imitate each other.' She also recommends that young smokers be no longer shown in anti-smoking campaigns. 'Merely the image of a young smoker might well cause another [young person](#) to light up a cigarette,' says the researcher.

The results of the research have been published online in the scientific journals [Nicotine](#) and *Tobacco Research and Drug and Alcohol Dependence*.

Provided by Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO)

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