

Social disapproval not fear helps smokers quit

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Researchers from Canterbury Christ Church University have found that smokers are more likely to stop because of anti-social attitudes towards them than from fear of ill-health.

In 2008 the [United Kingdom](#) became one of the first countries in Europe to make it mandatory for cigarette packets sold within the UK to display fear-provoking, graphic anti-smoking [images](#), founded on the [assumption](#) that the use of [fear](#) is an effective method to encourage [smokers](#) to quit.

However, in contrast to the assumed effects of fear on quitting intentions, a series of experiments conducted by Christ Church Psychologists Dr Wood and Dr Noor consistently revealed that fear provoked by graphic images had no effect on smokers' intentions to [stop smoking](#).

Instead the researchers found that smokers were more willing to consider quitting if they accepted non-smokers [negative attitudes](#) towards their habit.

Dr Wood explained: "It is difficult to determine just how effective the graphic warnings on the [cigarette packets](#) are on smokers' intentions to quit, so with this in mind we tested these assumptions using a multi-model approach. We concentrated on single and combined effects of four established theoretical factors that help to predict why smokers' decide to quit.

“We believe this is the first time such an approach to studying quitting intentions has been used and the results were very revealing. The lack of effect that the graphic images had on smokers’ intentions to quit persisted even when fear was considered in combination with other factors and this impact, or lack of, should be considered for future stop smoking policy and campaigns.”

Dr Noor added: “The graphic warnings implemented by the government were intended to raise awareness of the risks of smoking to current smokers and to deter younger adults and children from starting to smoke. However, inevitably as public images, they are also seen by those who do not smoke. Thus, we took a novel approach and asked whether graphic warnings highlighting the negative consequences of smoking would encourage non-smokers to generate negative attitudes, such as blame for a rise in health issues and general prejudice, towards smokers.

“This relationship between smokers and non-smokers is an important area that, so far, has been neglected by researchers, governments and health institutions as a source of encouragement for smokers to form intentions to quit. To fill this gap, we tested whether it was possible that awareness of negative non-smoker attitudes towards smokers could have the potential to increase intentions to quit in current smokers.

“Our findings revealed that when smokers were asked to read a summary of negative non-smoker attitudes towards smoking, they were encouraged to form the greatest intentions to quit smoking across all of the experiments.”

Dr Wood highlighted: “The research contains several important implications for the effectiveness of future anti-smoking campaigns. Firstly, our findings suggest that fear in the form of graphic warnings may not be the most effective measure to encourage smokers to quit. However, the effect that the warnings have on non-smokers and how it

endorses the formation of negative attitudes towards smokers should be carefully looked at for future stop smoking campaigns. We would recommend that in the future stop smoking policies utilise this relationship between smokers and non-smokers.”

Provided by Canterbury Christ Church University

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