

Substance abusers, even recovering ones, may face stigma

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Scenarios of obese people, smokers drew less negative reaction in study.

(HealthDay) -- People are more likely to disapprove of and avoid substance abusers than those who smoke or are obese, according to a new study.

Participants were presented with six fictitious scenarios about a person who either abused substances such as alcohol or drugs, smoked, or was obese.

"Specifically, participants rated their willingness for the individual in the fictitious scenario to marry into their family, be friends, socialize, work on a job, be a neighbor, and have one's child date," study author Lindsay Phillips, an assistant professor of psychology at Albright College in Reading, Pa., said in a college news release.

As expected, "people who were actively using substances were the most highly stigmatized group, receiving a high level of reported intention to be socially distant from the individual," Phillips said.

The results support previous research that found substance abusers were more stigmatized than people with depression or [schizophrenia](#). However, this new study also found that even former substance abusers still face high levels of social scorn.

"Although being in remission results in substantially less [stigma](#) for smoking and [obesity](#), stigma is only slightly decreased for individuals in remission from [substance use](#)," Phillips said.

The findings are troubling because past studies have suggested that stigma can discourage substance abusers from seeking help and make them believe that they can't change their ways, Phillips said.

The study is published online in the *Journal of Substance Use*.

More information: The U.S. National Institutes of Health has more about [substance abuse](#).

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