

Tobacco use more prevalent among African-American adolescents living in public housing communities

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Today, nearly 4,000 adolescents in the United States will smoke their first cigarette, and about a fourth of those youth will become daily smokers, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services reports. A recent study by a University of Missouri researcher found that African-American youths who live in public housing communities are 2.3 times more likely to use tobacco than other African-American youths.

"Compared to their same-aged peers, youth living in public housing were more likely to use tobacco and have [positive attitudes](#) about using tobacco," said Mansoo Yu, an assistant professor of social work and public health. "As previous research suggests, early use of tobacco increases individuals' chances of using more serious drugs later. In addition, early drug use is related to other serious problems, such as delinquent behaviors and family and social problems."

Yu and his colleagues surveyed 518 urban African-American youths ranging from ages 11 to 20 who resided in public housing communities in three large U.S. cities. The survey measured adolescents' attitudes toward tobacco use, depressive symptoms and delinquent behaviors.

Youths living in public housing might be more likely to be fearful, live around crime problems, have poorer [social relationships](#) and have higher levels of psychological strain. These factors could contribute to the increased rates of tobacco use, Yu said.

"[Smoking cessation](#) programs for young African Americans living in public housing communities should focus on reversing their positive attitudes toward [tobacco use](#)," Yu said. "In addition, programs should help address the youths' depressive symptoms and keep them from getting involved in delinquent behaviors."

Additionally, Yu said tobacco prevention programs should target young children in public housing communities.

"Early interventions are critical for these individuals since the likelihood of being exposed to [risky behaviors](#) dramatically increases as the children age," Yu said. "In public housing communities, adolescents may have easier access to drugs and social activities where drugs are used."

Provided by University of Missouri-Columbia

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