

Youth smoking rates reduced by restaurant bans

September 13 2012, by Amy Patterson Neubert

(Medical Xpress)—Teenagers and young adults are less likely to smoke when faced with restaurant smoking bans and minimum tobacco-purchase ages in Europe, according to new research by a Purdue University sociologist.

"Policies that restrict smoking directly affect young people's behavior, and that may be a key element to curb smoking rates because most adult smokers report starting when they were teenagers," says Mike Vuolo, an assistant professor of sociology who studies youth behavior. "In countries with restaurant [smoking bans](#), young people were 35 percent less likely to smoke regularly."

Most studies look at individual factors, such as income and education levels and smoking rates, but this study also examined policies and other [social influences](#), such as antismoking messages in [mass media](#) and cigarette taxes.

The article is published in a recent issue of *Social Forces*. The results are based on self-reported cigarette use of people ages 15-24 in the original 15 European Union countries, and the data is from Eurostat, the [European Commission](#)'s statistics branch, and the [World Health Organization](#). The survey information was collected in the spring of 2002, and there were 7,532 [respondents](#) with an average of 450 respondents per country.

In 2002, seven of the 15 [European countries](#) had restaurant smoking

bans.

"Enforcing a law certainly plays a role in influencing behavior," Vuolo said. "While the bans and policies create a physical obstacle to smoking, they also add a stigma that likely contributes to deterring young people from the habit."

The study also found that local taxes and anti-tobacco campaigns were less effective in reducing smoking than bans and age limits.

"Strategies that rely on a personal cost or a cry to change behavior, such as taxes or anti-smoking posters, weren't as likely to curb cigarette use as policies do," he said. "However, a long-term study that looks at the impact of each effort is needed to better understand how sociological factors contribute to individual behavior."

Because the 18-year-old minimum purchase age in the United States is universal, this finding is not as applicable as in Europe, when, at the time of the 2002 data collection, the restricted ages varied by regions. At that time, six countries had no minimum purchase age; three countries required consumers to be 18; and six countries required age 16.

In countries with no minimum purchase age, the probability of a young person smoking regularly was about 46 percent, compared to 30 percent in countries with age restrictions.

"Considering that most adult smokers start smoking when they are teenagers, these laws and bans can be a first step to discouraging young people from smoking," he said.

The research was completed during Vuolo's doctoral work at the University of Minnesota.

More information: Placing Deviance in a Legal and Logical Context: A Multilevel Analysis of Cigarette Use in the European Union, Mike Vuolo, *Social Forces*.

Abstract:

Though it has produced a high-quality body of research, the study of substance use has remained highly individualized in its focus. This paper adds further sociological understanding to that research. Using hierarchical methods, the following explores how institutional and criminological theories can be incorporated into substance use research by examining cigarette smoking at three levels of variation. Two main findings emerge. First, national legal context plays a role in understanding individual-level probabilities of substance use, even after controlling for individual and local characteristics. For example, lower probabilities of smoking occur where there are smoking bans and minimum purchase ages. Second, the effects of local context, such as unemployment and the percentage of young people, exhibit significant effects of individual-level cigarette use.

Provided by Purdue University

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