

Children of divorced parents more likely to start smoking

March 14 2013

Both daughters and sons from divorced families are significantly more likely to initiate smoking in comparison to their peers from intact families, shows a new analysis of 19,000 Americans.

This University of Toronto study, published online this month in the journal *Public Health*, shows that men who experienced [parental divorce](#) before they turned 18 had 48-per-cent higher odds of ever [smoking](#) 100 or more cigarettes than men whose parents did not divorce. Women from divorced families were also at risk, with 39-per-cent higher odds of smoking in comparison to women from intact families.

"Finding this link between parental divorce and smoking is very disturbing," says lead author Esme Fuller-Thomson, Sandra Rotman Chair at University of Toronto's Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work. "We had anticipated that the association between parental divorce and smoking would have been explained by one or more of three plausible factors, such as lower levels of education or adult income among the children of divorce; adult [mental health issues](#), such as depression or anxiety among the [children of divorce](#), or other co-occurring early childhood traumas, such as parental addictions or childhood physical, sexual or [emotional abuse](#).

"Each of these characteristics has been shown in other studies to be linked with smoking initiation. However, even when we took all these factors into account, a strong and significant association between parental divorce and smoking remained."

In the study entitled "The Gender-Specific Association Between Childhood Adversities and Smoking in [Adulthood](#): Findings from a Population Based Study," investigators examined a [representative sample](#) of 7,850 men and 11,506 women aged 18 and over, drawn from the Center for Disease Control's 2010 [Behavioral Risk Factor](#) Surveillance Survey. A total of 1,551 sons and 2,382 daughters had experienced their parents' divorce before the age of 18. A total of 4,316 men and 5,072 women reported that they had smoked at least 100 cigarettes in their life.

From this study, researchers cannot determine why parental divorce is linked to smoking initiation. However, co-author Joanne Filippelli, a University of Toronto doctoral student, suggests it is possible that "children upset by their parents' divorce may use smoking as a coping mechanism to regulate emotions and stress. Some research suggests this calming effect may be particularly attractive to those who have suffered early adversities."

Recent master's of social work graduate and co-author Candace Lue-Crisostomo said that this study shows adults from divorced families are more likely to smoke but it's not known exactly when or why they began smoking. "These findings need to be replicated in longitudinal studies before causality can be established. If the parental divorce-smoking link is shown to be causal in future studies, then smoking prevention programs targeted at children whose parents are going through a divorce might prove helpful."

Cigarette smoking is one of the leading preventable causes of chronic illness and premature death. The estimated economic burden of smoking exceeded \$193 billion annually in the U.S.

More information: [\(13\)00007-3/abstract%20](http://www.publichealthjrnl.com/artic...)

Provided by University of Toronto

Citation: Children of divorced parents more likely to start smoking (2013, March 14) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2013-03-children-divorced-parents.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.