

Smoking more common in films produced outside of Hollywood

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Films made in countries outside of the US are more likely to show characters smoking on screen than those produced in Hollywood, reports a paper published today in the open access journal *BMC Public Health*. The authors recommend that countries prohibit tobacco use in films that receive government subsidies.

Previous research has shown that exposure to on-screen tobacco use promotes smoking in young people. However, these studies have primarily focused on US-produced [films](#) that dominate cinema markets in many countries. There has been little research on tobacco content in nationally-produced films from countries outside the US, which often benefit from government funding. In 1997 the US banned paid product placement of tobacco in films, but in many other countries similar regulations are not in place. The authors of this paper wanted to understand the prevalence of smoking and drinking alcohol in nationally-produced films and the potential implications for [public health](#) policy.

An international team of researchers from the US (University of South Carolina and Dartmouth University), Mexico (National Institute of Public Health), Argentina (Centre for Studies of the State and Society), and Germany (Institute for Therapy and Health Research) compared 502 US films with 337 nationally-produced films from six European countries and two Latin American countries. All the films were produced between 2004 and 2009 and were commercially successful based on box office earnings. The scientists analysed films for whether any characters smoked or drank alcohol, as well as for the total period of time showing these two activities. Films were categorised according to ratings given to films in each country, where 'youth-rated' films were those deemed suitable for young people aged 14 years old and younger.

The study found that nationally-produced films from countries outside the US are more likely to show characters smoking than US films. Icelandic films had the highest percentage of tobacco use, with all youth-rated films featuring smoking. The Netherlands had the lowest percentage, with 53% of youth-rated films showing characters smoking. However, in films that contained smoking, only Argentine films portrayed smoking on screen for a longer time than in US films. From 75% to 97% of films in each country portrayed alcohol drinking, with few differences between US films and other nationally-produced films.

A full breakdown of the prevalence and mean seconds of screen time for portraying these behaviours is given in Figure 2 in the research paper.

Dr. James Thrasher, senior researcher for the study from the University of South Carolina's Arnold School of Public Health, said: "Our study found that the presence of tobacco and alcohol in films is high, whether the film is made in Europe or the Americas. Even in countries where tobacco industry payment for product placement is prohibited by law, more than half of films contain tobacco [-countries](#) without these policies were even more likely to show tobacco use on screen. No country we studied has implemented policies to reduce alcohol use in films, and alcohol use is universally high across all films."

The authors highlight that because [young people](#) have a stronger affinity with actors of their own nationality, the impact of smoking and [alcohol](#) use in nationally-produced films may be higher. Dr Thrasher adds: "Films are powerful vehicles for influencing behaviours. As recommended by the World Health Organization, governments seeking to reduce adolescent [smoking](#) should consider no longer funding national films that portray [tobacco](#) use."

More information: Inti Barrientos-Gutierrez et al. Comparison of tobacco and alcohol use in films produced in Europe, Latin America, and the United States, *BMC Public Health* (2015). [DOI: 10.1186/s12889-015-2378-x](#)

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