

What's love got to do with it? Drinking, smoking and teen romance

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Research published in the *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth* has examined whether the desire for romance leads to increased substance alcohol or tobacco use in adolescents. Wura Jacobs, Kwon Chan Jeon, Patricia Goodson & Thomas W. Valente studied over 1,100 Grade 10 pupils in Los Angeles, USA examining whether an association could be drawn between romantic ambition and the interaction with tobacco and alcohol. The research, published in December 2015, adds to the ongoing inquiries around how romantic relationships can affect adolescents in social development, academia, health and general well-being.

The study measured two elements for each subject: the number of peers who considered the subject romantically and the number of peers that the subject considered or 'nominated' romantically. This was cross compared with the adolescent's alcohol and [tobacco](#) consumption over the previous 30 days. The researchers also tested to see if substance use had associations with academic performance and family influence.

While the schools varied with regard to their 10th-grade students' alcohol use, overall, 35.5% of the total sample reported consuming alcohol within the past month, not including those who drank for religious purposes, whereas less than 10% of students reported having smoked in the previous 30 days.

The researchers found opposing results for the effect of romantic desire on drinking versus smoking. They discovered that the adolescents

actively seeking or aspiring to date are less likely to report smoking, possibly because it could be socially isolating. Conversely, with every increase in romantic nominations received, the popular teens in the study were slightly more likely to report drinking. These findings support theories that popular students are more likely to drink possibly because they attend more social gatherings that encourage drinking.

This study is unique because it looks at aspirational rather than existing romantic relationships – the important stage of crushes and budding romances. Implications include the possibility that romantic crushes may have a stronger impact on alcohol use than other friendship networks and that these aspirations and relationships could act as bridge between users and non-users of [alcohol](#) in teens. Further research related to [adolescents'](#) social networks are suggested by the authors.

More information: Wura Jacobs et al. Adolescent romantic networks and substance use , *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth* (2015). [DOI: 10.1080/02673843.2015.1122643](https://doi.org/10.1080/02673843.2015.1122643)

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