

Children's willpower linked to smoking habits throughout life

September 13 2016

Scientists from the University of Stirling have discovered a link between childhood self-control and smoking habits across life.

Behavioural Scientist Dr Michael Daly and his team examined 21,000 people from the UK tracked over four decades. The researchers found [children](#) with [low self-control](#) by age 10/11 were more likely to take up smoking in adolescence and had substantially higher rates of smoking as adults, even decades later aged 55.

Dr Daly explained: "We first saw that children with low self-control were twice as likely to smoke as adults compared to their more self-controlled peers. We then examined alternative explanations like differences in parental smoking, intelligence, and social class. Even after taking these factors into account, we found that low self-control, measured early in life before smoking is initiated, predicts a substantially raised risk of smoking throughout adulthood."

Additionally, the study found that children who lacked self-control tended to go on to smoke more cigarettes, had greater difficulty quitting smoking and relapsed to smoking at higher rates when they did manage to quit.

Self-control varies widely between children. The characteristics of those with low (vs. high) self-control in this study were identified using teacher-ratings and included poor attention, lack of persistence and impulsive behaviour. The researchers called for action to support these

young people to increase their life chances.

Dr Daly continued: "Many efforts focus exclusively on educating children about the dangers of smoking. However, our findings suggest that a complementary approach - one which increases general self-control - could have lifelong health benefits. Prior research from our team and others has indicated that raising a child with high self-control is likely to improve school grades, employment prospects, quality of relationships and mental and physical health. We can now add not [smoking](#) to that already formidable list - along with the diverse health and other benefits that non-smokers enjoy."

The participants were drawn from two nationally representative cohort studies; the 1970 British Cohort Study (BCS) and the 1958 National Child Development Study (NCDS), with participants reporting their [smoking status](#) at five time points (ages 26 to 42 years) in the BCS and six time points (ages 23 to 55 years) in the NCDS.

More information: Michael Daly et al. Childhood Self-Control Predicts Smoking Throughout Life: Evidence From 21,000 Cohort Study Participants., *Health Psychology* (2016). [DOI: 10.1037/hea0000393](#)

Provided by University of Stirling

Citation: Children's willpower linked to smoking habits throughout life (2016, September 13) retrieved 20 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2016-09-children-willpower-linked-habits-life.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.