

Unsafe neighborhoods could drive up smoking rates

July 4 2024, by Robin Foster



It may sound far-fetched, but new research suggests that living in dangerous neighborhoods could trigger an unintended health harm:

higher smoking rates among residents.

"High levels of neighborhood threat shape perceptions of powerlessness among residents, amplifying a general sense of mistrust, that can promote maladaptive coping behavior like smoking," said researcher Michael Zvolensky, a professor of psychology at the University of Houston.

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the neighborhoods people live in can determine their health and well-being.

While such factors are now understood as important factors in the onset, maintenance and relapse of substance use behavior, little research has evaluated what the researchers called "neighborhood vigilance" in terms of smoking rates, the researchers noted.

Zvolensky's team examined the role of neighborhood vigilance in terms of smoking and the severity of problems smokers thought they might face if they try to quit.

Living in less secure neighborhoods was tied to smokers thinking it would be tough to quit, expecting "[negative mood](#) and harmful consequences," Zvolensky said in a university news release.

These types of neighborhoods were "also associated with more severe problems when trying to quit smoking," he added.

The findings support the notion that [dangerous neighborhoods](#) exacerbate "certain negative beliefs about abstinence and challenges in quitting," Zvolensky said.

Participants in the study included 93 adult smokers who were seeking cessation treatment. Of the group, 64.5% identified as Black American,

30.1% identified as white, 3.2% identified as other and 2.2% identified as Asian. The group answered questions about their own socio-demographic characteristics and their neighborhoods.

The findings were reported recently in the journal [*Substance Use & Misuse*](#).

Zvolensky said the findings point to the need for [smoking](#) cessation efforts that focus on [social factors](#) like neighborhood vigilance.

More information: Michael J. Zvolensky et al, Neighborhood Vigilance in Terms of Abstinence Expectancies for Smoking and Severity of Problems When Quitting, *Substance Use & Misuse* (2024). [DOI: 10.1080/10826084.2024.2360092](#)

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has more on [smoking and health](#).

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