

A Weekly FAX from the Center for Substance Abuse Research

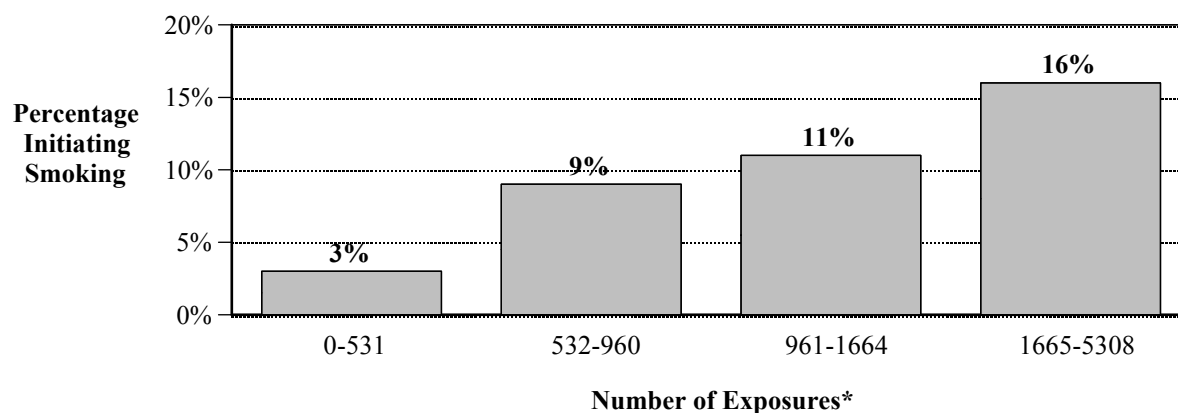
University of Maryland, College Park

Exposure to Smoking in Movies Related to Youths' Smoking Initiation

Youths who view more smoking in movies are more likely to initiate smoking, according to a study of 5th-8th grade students in Vermont and New Hampshire. Youths who reported never smoking were assessed for their exposure to smoking in movies and then re-interviewed 13-26 months later to determine whether they had started smoking. Only 3% of youths who had the lowest exposure to smoking in movies reported that they had started smoking, compared to 16% of those with the highest exposure. This association remained even after adjusting for sociodemographic factors (such as grade and sex), social influences (such as friends', siblings', or parents' smoking), characteristics of the child (such as sensation seeking and receptivity to tobacco promotions), and parenting styles (such as authoritative parenting). While the authors caution that they "cannot exclude the possibility that some other aspect of R-rated movies influences smoking initiation" (almost all R-rated movies contain smoking), they point out that "more than 40 years of research shows that observers imitate specific behaviors they see modelled" (p. 4). They also note that "not all initiators will become established smokers. Further research is needed to assess the effect of exposure to smoking in movies on long-term smoking behavior" (p. 4).

Percentage of Vermont and New Hampshire 5th-8th Grade Students That Initiated Smoking, by Exposure to Smoking in Movies, 1999

(n=2,603)



*Exposure to movie smoking was calculated by summing the number of smoking occurrences for each movie the respondent had seen based on a list of 50 movies randomly selected for each individual survey from a sample of 601 popular contemporary movies released between 1988 and 1999.

SOURCE: Adapted by CESAR from Dalton M.A., Sargent J.D., Beach M.L., Titus-Ernstoff L., Gibson J.J., Ahrens M.B., Tickle J.J., Heatherton T.F., "Effect of viewing smoking in movies on adolescent smoking initiation: a cohort study." *The Lancet*, June 10, 2003. For more information contact Dr. Dalton at madeline.dalton@dartmouth.edu.

• 301-403-8329 (voice) • 301-403-8342 (fax) • CESAR@cesar.umd.edu • www.cesar.umd.edu •

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