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HEALTH EDUCATION  
AND PROMOTION

NORMATIVE BELIEFS AMONG ADOLESCENT NON-SMOKERS INTENDING  
AND NOT INTENDING TO INITIATE TOBACCO USE (134 pp.)

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The prevalence of cigarette use is relatively high among American youth (Grunbaum et al., 2004). Everyday, an estimated 2,000 young persons start smoking (USDHHS, 2000). This exploratory study investigated the role that normative beliefs play in distinguishing between adolescent non-smokers who intend to initiate cigarette smoking in the near future and non-smokers who intend to refrain from the use of cigarettes.

The instrument used for this study was that employed by the Substance Abuse Monitoring Survey (SAMS) (Olds & Thombs, 2004). This 63-item self-report questionnaire assessed socio-demographic measures, cigarette, alcohol, and marijuana use, and peer substance use norms. For the purposes of this study, data analysis was limited to measures assessing tobacco use and tobacco norms. This convenience sample consisted of 6,595 students enrolled in 9 northeast Ohio school districts. The data were collected in the academic years 1999-2000 to 2003-2004.

In a logistic regression analysis, the predictor set had a significant effect on intentions to initiate smoking, as indicated by model chi-square at step 1 = 116.118,  $df = 24$ ,  $p < .05$ . The predictor set explained approximately 21% of the variance in intention to start smoking cigarettes.

The best predictors of intention to start smoking cigarettes were: (a) perceived acceptability of starting to smoke among siblings, (b) perceived acceptability of starting to smoke among close friends, (c) perceived acceptability of starting to smoke among one's teachers, (d) perceived prevalence of smoking among close friends, and (e) academic performance, in that order. These findings provided empirical support for the study's hypothesis that among adolescent non-smokers, proximal perceived norm measures would be superior to distal perceived norm measures in discriminating between those who intend to initiate cigarette smoking in the near future and those who do not intend to do so. This finding is consistent with previous research on teenagers as well as college students, which have found that proximal perceived norm measures, are more closely associated with substance use than distal perceived norm measures (Thombs et al., 1997; Baer et al., 1991; Thombs et al., 2000).

Results from this study suggest that a much more robust strategy for providing normative education would focus on delivering feedback about proximal norms (close friends, siblings, and one's teachers). In addition, a critical issue for delivering normative education in schools seems to be teacher training. The findings from this study suggest that teachers could be effective in establishing conservative normative beliefs. Finally, the findings from this study suggest that the social norms model is a useful conceptual framework for explaining the initiation or acquisition of cigarette use among teenagers.