

What Do We Really Know About College Smokers?

Are College Student Smokers Really a Homogenous Group? A Latent Class Analysis of College Student Smokers.

Erin L. Sutfin, Beth A. Reboussin, Thomas P. McCoy, and Mark Wolfson. *Nicotine and Tobacco Research*. 2009 Apr, Vol 11(4), 444-54.

Background: Generally, college students who smoke (those who report smoking on at least one of the past 30 days) are thought to be a homogenous group. However, the authors hypothesize that college student smokers are, in fact, a diverse group. The aim of their research is to characterize patterns of smoking among college students using latent class analysis.

Latent class analysis is a method of identifying unmeasured class membership of a group. It involves categorizing people based on common traits, such as smoking habits and drinking environments, and extends beyond just looking at outcomes (i.e., smokers versus nonsmokers).

Method: The authors had a sample size of 1,102 students from 10 North Carolina colleges who completed a web-based survey. The survey was designed to differentiate smoking behaviors. These included quantity and frequency of smoking, smoking contexts and weekly patterns of smoking.

Key Findings: Their research identified five subclasses of smokers: "heavy smokers" (28%), "moderate smokers" (22%), "social smokers" (19%), "puffers" (26%), and "no context smokers" (4%). There were varied

demographic characteristics among the five subclasses of smokers.

Heavy and social smokers tended to be older than puffers. This suggests a transition from experimentation (puffers) to regular use (heavy and social) over time.

Social smokers and puffers were more likely to be in Greek letter organizations than heavy or moderate smokers. There is a strong relationship between moderate and social smokers and alcohol use. Moderate and social smokers tended to be current drinkers and have engaged in high-risk drinking in the last two months.

Thoughts: The study shows that, while college smokers are a disparate group, there are also subclassifications of disparities within the collegiate smoker population. This allows us, as college health professionals, to develop targeted programming. Programming that is targeted toward puffers or social smokers should be different than programming targeted at heavy or moderate smokers.

We recognize that our student population is diverse in many of their views and health behaviors and adjust our programming accordingly. This is one more way that we can adjust our programming to be the most effective in changing smoking behavior.

Written by Julie Weissbuch, Director of Colorado Tobacco Prevention and Control Initiatives at The BACCHUS Network™

Hookah Use Popular Among University Students

Students are smoking hookah at a higher rate than expected at the University of Pittsburgh. Primack, B.A., Sidani, J. (et al.) *Annals of Behavioral Medicine*, Springer New York, August 22, 2008, vol. 36, no. 1, pp. 81-86.

Background: With the increased use of waterpipe tobacco (also known as hookah smoking), the smoking rate seems to be increasing on university campuses around the nation. Although this trend has been hypothesized, the data have come from convenience samples. In this study, the authors examine the prevalence of, and associations with, waterpipe tobacco smoking among students at the University of Pittsburgh.

Methods: Researchers surveyed a random sample of graduate and undergraduate students at a large, urban university. The researchers looked at the independent associations between belief-related predictors and waterpipe tobacco smoking.

Key Findings: Of the 647 respondents, 40.5% used a waterpipe to smoke at some point in their life, 30.6% reported using a waterpipe in the past year, and 9.5% used a waterpipe within the past 30 days. Over half of the sample perceived tobacco smoking from a waterpipe to be less addictive than cigarette smoking. The researchers found that one-year waterpipe smoking was associated with low perceived harm, low perceived addictiveness, perception of high social acceptability, and high perception of popularity. The study also revealed that waterpipe use is a more complex issue to address than cigarette smoking because of the perceived lack of danger and casual use among college students.

Thoughts: This study's results reveal that a large number of college students may not understand the addictive and harmful nature of waterpipe use. Instead, they see waterpipe use as a low risk recreational activity that is socially acceptable and healthier than cigarettes.

The results of this of study should spur peer educators and campus health administrators to educate students on the potential side effects of waterpipe usage in the same manner as cigarette and spit tobacco usage. Waterpipe usage also should be included in the campus tobacco policy in order to protect students from the potential dangers of the product.

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