

SMOKING IN FILMS

Does it encourage
young people to smoke?

And what can be done about it?



Smoking remains the single greatest preventable cause of mortality in Europe. Adolescents usually start smoking for social reasons. Social influences include people in the immediate social environment like parents, peers and friends, but also images in the media.

Films are an extremely important part of young people's social environment.

Research shows that many films contain tobacco images that might make smoking appear both more common and socially acceptable than it actually is.

We conducted a study in six European countries – Germany, Iceland, Italy, Poland, The Netherlands, and the United Kingdom – to get answers to the following questions:

- 1) How much smoking is there in films shown in Europe?**
- 2) Who has access to films that portray smoking?**
- 3) Is seeing smoking in films associated with young people's own smoking?**
- 4) If yes, what can be done to reduce young people's exposure to images of smoking in films?**

How much smoking is there in films shown in Europe?

- We analyzed the 250 most commercially successful films between 2004 and 2009 in each of the six countries.
- 71% of the films contained at least one smoking scene.
- On average, each list of 250 films contained 5,828 smoking scenes.
- This is an average of 23 smoking scenes per film.

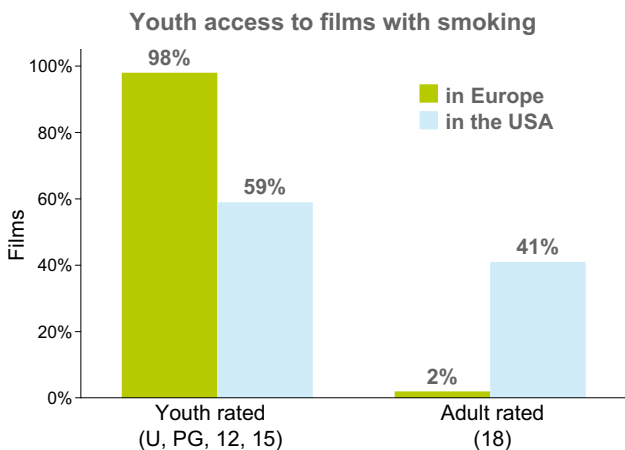
Who has access to films that portray smoking?

We also studied how many films with smoking scenes had an “adult rating” (18).

In Europe, only 2% of the films that contained smoking had an adult rating. All the rest of the films with smoking were rated as suitable for children or adolescents.

This is very different from the USA, where 41% of films with smoking scenes received an adult rating.

Smoking in films and age classifications

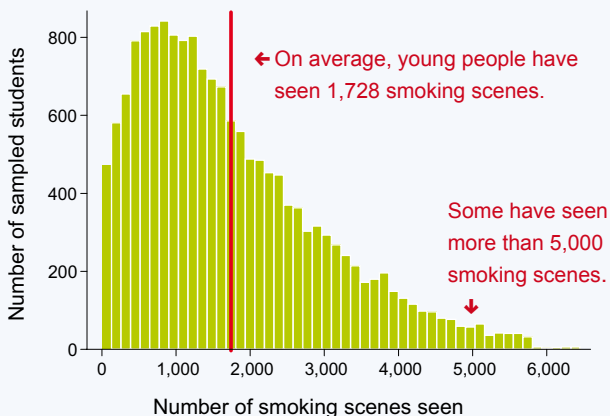


98% of films containing smoking are rated as suitable for viewing by children and young people in Europe.

How many smoking scenes do young people see?

- We asked more than 16,000 young people aged 12-15 years which of the films they had seen.
- We used this to calculate how many smoking scenes they had seen in the films they had watched.
- On average, each young person was exposed to 1,728 smoking scenes.
- We estimated that some had seen many more smoking scenes (more than 5,000) in films.

Number of smoking scenes seen by young people

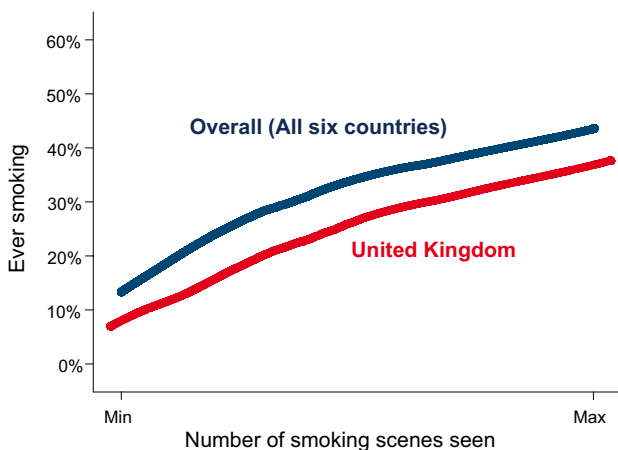


Is seeing smoking portrayals in films associated with young people's own smoking?

We found a consistent association in all countries between the number of smoking portrayals which young people had seen in films and the likelihood of them having tried smoking.

The consistency is remarkable as the six countries differ greatly in their tobacco control policies, smoking levels and attitudes towards smoking.

Smoking in films and adolescent smoking

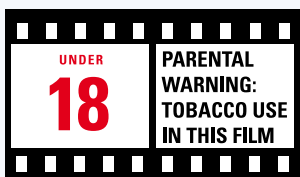


The more smoking scenes a young person has seen, the more likely s/he is to have tried smoking.

Smoking in films had the same effect on young people in the United Kingdom as in other countries. The gap between the red and the blue lines shows that the frequency of ever smoking was lower in the UK compared to the average of the six countries which took part in our study.

What can be done to reduce young people's exposure to smoking images in films?

Since we know that young people who see more images of smoking are more likely to take up smoking, a key goal should be to reduce levels of child and adolescent exposure to smoking in films.



Changing the film rating system to take account of smoking images in films would be an effective method of reducing child and adolescent exposure to smoking images without interfering with film content.

Smoking in a film should be a criterion for judging the age-appropriateness of that film.

What parents can do to protect their children

Measures to reduce media influences on children and adolescents:

- 1. Discuss limits to the time your children spend with “screen-media” and talk about why age-appropriate limits are set.**
- 2. Wherever possible, watch films together with your younger children and discuss the content of films and other media with them.**





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More detailed information on smoking in films can be found:

Our project Website

www.smokefreemovies-europe.eu

Website of the University of California, San Francisco:

www.smokefreemovies.ucsf.edu

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<http://thorax.bmj.com/>

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