

Reduced Youth Smoking By

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Study finds young people exposed to state-sponsored anti-smoking ads have stronger anti smoking attitudes and beliefs.

Youths who view anti smoking television ads sponsored by states are less likely to smoke, according to a study published in the July 2005 issue of the Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine.

Researchers from Bridging the Gap, a policy research program based at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) and the University of Michigan, found "strong associations" between state-sponsored anti-smoking media campaigns and the amount of youth smoking, as well as youth attitudes and beliefs about smoking. This is the first study to explore the impact of state-sponsored anti-tobacco advertising while controlling for other tobacco-related advertising. The National Cancer Institute, the National Institute on Drug Abuse and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation funded the study.

"Our research shows that kids reached by state-sponsored anti-smoking TV ads are less likely to smoke or believe their friends smoke, and more likely to perceive a risk of addiction and harm from smoking," said Sherry Emery, a UIC researcher and the study's lead author. "These findings lead us to believe that state-sponsored anti-tobacco ads have played an important role in reducing youth smoking and that cutting support for these ads, as so many states recently have, is a step in the wrong direction."

To arrive at their findings, Emery and her colleagues combined

two sets of data. First, they gathered Nielsen commercial ratings of network and cable television audience exposure to anti-tobacco advertising across the largest 75 U.S. media markets in 1999-2000. They merged that information with survey data from samples of school students in the contiguous 48 states taken in the same timeframe. The youth data, collected by the University of Michigan Monitoring the Future study, measured student characteristics, smoking-related attitudes and beliefs, and self-reported tobacco use by 8th, 10th and 12th graders. The final sample size for the report was 51,085 students.

Researchers used Targeted Ratings Points (TRPs) to determine the average reach and frequency of smoking-related advertisement among 12- to 17-year-olds for each of the 75 markets. They found that students from media markets with higher TRPs, or greater ratings, for state-sponsored anti-tobacco ads were significantly less likely to have smoked in the past 30 days than students from markets with lower TRPs. Additionally, adolescent smokers in markets with the higher TRP measure smoked fewer cigarettes per day compared to adolescent smokers in markets with lower TRPs.

The data also revealed that students from media markets with higher TRPs for the state-sponsored ads tended to have stronger attitudes and beliefs about the risks of tobacco use and the benefits of not starting smoking than students from markets with lower TRPs. Higher TRP students were more likely to perceive great harm from smoking one or more packs of cigarettes per day and less likely to report that most or all of their friends were smokers compared to their counterparts in lower TRP areas. Students in areas with higher TRPs also were more likely to report that they would not be smoking in five years' time, indicating a reduced intention to smoke.

Bridging the Gap, which is funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, is a joint project of ImpacTeen, a program of the University of Illinois at Chicago's Institute for Health

Research and Policy, and Youth Education and Society (YES!), a program of the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research. Bridging the Gap improves understanding of the role of policy and environmental factors in youth alcohol, illicit drug, and tobacco use, as well as diet and physical activity, to evaluate their effectiveness in reducing substance use and obesity among youth.