Predictors of Different Cigarette Access Behaviours Among Occasional and Regular Smoking Youth

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ABSTRACT

Background: Understanding the different ways underage youth access tobacco is required in order to develop more effective tobacco access restrictions. The purpose of this study was to examine characteristics that predict whether underage smoking youth buy their own cigarettes, buy their cigarettes from friends, or get someone else to buy their cigarettes.

Methods: Logistic regression analyses were used to examine the predictors of three different tobacco access behaviours among 737 occasional smoking and 2,050 regular smoking youth.

Results: Most smoking youth were asked their age less than half of the time when trying to buy cigarettes. Occasional smokers usually buy their cigarettes from a friend (59.5%) and the majority of regular smokers usually buy their own cigarettes (59.8%). Occasional smokers were less likely to buy their own cigarettes (OR 0.85) and more likely to ask someone else to buy their cigarettes (OR 1.24) the more frequently they were asked their age on purchase attempts. Regular smokers were also less likely to buy their own cigarettes (OR 0.70) and more likely to buy their cigarettes from someone else (OR 1.51) or a friend (OR 1.18) the more frequently they were asked their age on purchase attempts.

Interpretation: Point-of-sale restrictions are insufficient to prevent youth from acquiring cigarettes because youth commonly access cigarettes from social sources. A more comprehensive approach for restricting access is required that targets both underage youth and individuals who purchase tobacco for underage youth.

MeSH Terms: Smoking; adolescent

La traduction du résumé se trouve à la fin de l'article.

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Point-of-sale access restrictions (PSR) were developed to prevent underage youth from being able to purchase tobacco due to the mounting evidence that youth smoking behaviour was related to access to tobacco.[1,2] Although PSR have proliferated in the last decade, research has found that they have not decreased the ability of underage youth to obtain cigarettes,[3-5] or changed their perceived difficulty in obtaining tobacco.[5] Youth continue to access tobacco with relative ease.

Two limitations associated with existing PSR help to explain their lack of success. First, many retailers continue to sell tobacco to youth illegally.[5,6] In order for PSR to be effective, retailer compliance must approach 100% as it only takes one non-compliant retailer to limit their effectiveness; youth who are aware of a retailer who illegally sells tobacco will travel, even across communities, to buy tobacco from that retailer.[5] In addition, even when retailers do ask to see age identification, clerks commonly miscalculate the minor's age.[7] Second, there has been an increase in youth accessing cigarettes through social sources.[8-10] Youth who are unable to purchase tobacco from a retailer commonly ask others to purchase cigarettes for them.[10-14] These sources include friends[10,11] or strangers.[10-14] In their current form, PSR do not stop youth from accessing tobacco.

In order to reduce youth access to tobacco, a better understanding of different tobacco access behaviours is required. This information could help guide the development of future initiatives designed to prevent youth from taking advantage of the inherent limitations of existing PSR. Therefore, the purpose of the present study was to examine characteristics that predict whether occasional and regular smokers buy their own cigarettes, buy their cigarettes from friends, or get someone else to buy their cigarettes.

METHODS

Design

This secondary analysis used cross-sectional data from the School Smoking Profile (SSP) Project (described in an earlier report).[15]

Procedure

The SSP tobacco use questionnaire was administered to students at 29 secondary

schools (grades 9 to 13) in the province of Ontario, Canada. Passive consent was used to reduce demands on schools and to increase participation rates. The University of Waterloo Office of Research Ethics approved the SSP Project and the present study.

Participants

Participants were drawn from the 22,091 students who completed the SSP at the 29 secondary schools. Of the eligible students, 737 (3.3%) occasional smokers and 2,050 (9.3%) regular smokers reported that they buy their own cigarettes, get someone else to buy their cigarettes, or buy their cigarettes from a friend.

Measures

Outcome Variables

Student smokers were asked to report how they usually obtain their cigarettes. Based on available data, three different outcome variables were created: *Buys their own cigarettes* [usually buys his/her own cigarettes (1) vs. does not usually buy his/her own cigarettes (0)]; *Someone else buys them* [usually gets someone else to buy his/her cigarettes (1) vs. does not usually get someone else to buy his/her cigarettes (0)]; and, *Buys them from a friend* [usually buys his/her cigarettes from a friend (1) vs. does not usually buy his/her cigarettes from a friend (0)].

Predictor Variables

Students were asked if they had a father who smoked cigarettes (Yes or No), if they had a mother who smoked cigarettes (Yes or No), if they had an older brother or sister who smoked cigarettes (Yes or No), and how many of their five closest friends smoked cigarettes (0 to 5). Students also reported how often they are asked their age when trying to buy their own cigarettes ("never", "less than half of the time", "about half of the time", "more than half of the time", "always or almost always").

Analysis

Occasional smokers were defined as students who smoked more than once in the 30 days prior to the survey but did not smoke everyday or almost everyday. Regular smokers were defined as students who smoked everyday or almost everyday in the 30 days prior to the survey. Separate logistic regression models were conducted among occasional and regular smokers to examine predictors of 1) *Buys their own cigarettes*, 2) *Someone else buys them*, and 3) *Buys them from a friend*. The statistical package SAS 8.02[16] was used for all analyses.

TABLE I

Descriptive Statistics for the Sample of Students in Grades 9 to 13 Who Are Occasional (N=737) and Regular Smokers (N=2,050)

		Occasional Smokers %	Regular Smokers %
Demographic Characteristics			
Gender	Male	46.9	51.9
	Female	53.1	48.1
Age	13	0.4	1.0
	14	16.4	7.8
	15	25.1	18.6
	16	23.2	26.1
	17	20.6	28.1
	18	14.3	18.4
Social Environmental Influences			
Father smokes	Yes	62.9	71.2
	No	38.1	28.8
Mother smokes	Yes	47.9	60.3
	No	52.1	39.7
Older sibling(s) smoke	Yes	4.4	9.5
	No	95.6	90.5
Number of close friends who smoke	None	11.2	2.4
	1	18.4	4.2
	2	22.5	9.1
	3	20.8	15.6
	4	12.4	22.4
	5	14.7	46.3
How often student is asked their age when trying to buy cigarettes	Never	48.4	38.1
	Less than half the time	20.5	26.1
	About half the time	10.9	12.0
	More than half the time	7.6	8.8
	Always or almost always	12.6	15.0
Access Behaviour			
How student usually gets his/her cigarettes	Buy their own cigarettes	20.6	59.8
	Someone else buys them	19.9	33.6
	Buys them from a friend	59.5	6.6

RESULTS

Demographic characteristics of the samples are presented in Table I. Results for the logistic regression models are presented in Table II for occasional smokers and Table III for regular smokers.

Restricted access

The students included in the present study were under the legal age to purchase tobacco in Ontario (19 years of age),[17] yet the majority of occasional smokers (68.9%) and regular smokers (64.2%) report that they were asked their age less than half of the time when trying to buy cigarettes.

Access behaviour

The majority of occasional smokers reported usually buying their cigarettes from a friend (59.5%), whereas the majority of regular smokers reported usually buying their own cigarettes (59.8%). Many occasional and regular smokers also reported that they usually ask someone else to buy their cigarettes (19.9% and 33.6%, respectively).

Occasional smokers' tobacco access behaviour

Buying Their Own Cigarettes

The odds of an occasional smoker buying his/her own cigarettes increased with age (OR 1.48, 95% CI 1.31-1.67), and males were more likely than females to buy their own cigarettes (OR 1.50, 95% CI 1.10-2.06). The more frequently that occasional smokers are asked their age when trying to buy cigarettes, the less likely they are to buy their own cigarettes (OR 0.85, 95% CI 0.76-0.95).

Getting Someone Else to Buy Their Cigarettes

The odds of an occasional smoker asking someone else to buy his/her cigarettes decreased with age (OR 0.65, 95% CI 0.56-0.76), and males were less likely than females to ask someone else to buy their cigarettes (OR 0.59, 95% CI 0.41-0.86). The more frequently that occasional smokers are asked their age when trying to buy

TABLE II

Logistic Regression: Predictors of Different Access Behaviours Among Occasional Smokers (n=737)

Parameter	Standardized Beta (S.E.)	Alpha	Odds Ratio (95% CI)
Usually Buys Their Own Cigarettes*			
Demographic Characteristics			
Gender (Male)	0.41 (0.16)	p<0.011	1.50 (1.10, 2.06)
Age	0.39 (0.06)	p<0.001	1.48 (1.31, 1.67)
Social Influences			
Mother smokes	0.23 (0.16)	p<0.156	1.26 (0.92, 1.74)
Father smokes	-0.19 (0.17)	p<0.244	0.82 (0.59, 1.14)
Older sibling(s) smoke	0.55 (0.36)	p<0.130	1.74 (0.85, 3.55)
Number of close friends who smoke	0.04 (0.05)	p<0.415	1.04 (0.94, 1.15)
Frequency of being asked their age when trying to buy cigarettes	-0.16 (0.06)	p<0.004	0.85 (0.76, 0.95)
Usually Gets Someone Else to Buy Their Cigarettes†			
Demographic Characteristics			
Gender (Male)	-0.52 (0.19)	p<0.006	0.59 (0.41, 0.86)
Age	-0.43 (0.07)	p<0.001	0.65 (0.56, 0.76)
Social Influences			
Mother smokes	-0.28 (0.20)	p<0.163	0.76 (0.51, 1.12)
Father smokes	0.39 (0.21)	p<0.062	1.48 (0.98, 2.23)
Older sibling(s) smoke	-0.25 (0.45)	p<0.580	0.78 (0.32, 1.89)
Number of close friends who smoke	0.04 (0.06)	p<0.547	1.04 (0.92, 1.18)
Frequency of being asked their age when trying to buy cigarettes	0.22 (0.07)	p<0.001	1.24 (1.09, 1.42)
Usually Buys Their Cigarettes from a Friend‡			
Demographic Characteristics			
Gender (Male)	-0.14 (0.16)	p<0.372	0.87 (0.63, 1.19)
Age	-0.08 (0.06)	p<0.142	0.92 (0.81, 1.03)
Social Influences			
Mother smokes	-0.18 (0.17)	p<0.277	0.84 (0.60, 1.16)
Father smokes	-0.07 (0.17)	p<0.684	0.93 (0.67, 1.30)
Older sibling(s) smoke	-0.22 (0.39)	p<0.561	0.80 (0.38, 1.70)
Number of close friends who smoke	-0.06 (0.05)	p<0.233	0.94 (0.85, 1.04)
Frequency of being asked their age when trying to buy cigarettes	-0.01 (0.06)	p<0.829	0.99 (0.88, 1.10)

SE = Standard Error CI = Confidence Interval

* Buys their own cigarettes (n=298) vs. Does not buy their own cigarettes (n=439); *c* statistic = 0.67

† Gets someone else to buy their cigarettes (n=151) vs. Does not get someone else to buy their cigarettes (n=586); *c* statistic = 0.70

‡ Gets a friend to buy their cigarettes (n=243) vs. Does not get a friend to buy their cigarettes (n=494); *c* statistic = 0.56

cigarettes, the more likely they are to get someone else to buy their cigarettes (OR 1.24, 95% CI 1.09-1.42).

Buying Their Cigarettes from a Friend

None of the factors examined were significantly related to whether or not an occasional smoker usually buys their cigarettes from a friend.

Regular smokers' tobacco access behaviour

Buying Their Own Cigarettes

The odds of a regular smoker buying his/her own cigarettes increased with age (OR 1.89, 95% CI 1.74-2.06), and males were more likely than females to buy their own cigarettes (OR 1.63, 95% CI 1.33-1.99). The more frequently that regular smokers are asked their age when trying to buy cigarettes, the less likely they are to buy their own cigarettes (OR 0.70, 95% CI 0.65-0.75). In addition, regular smokers with an older sibling who smokes are also less likely to buy their own cigarettes (OR 0.69, 95% CI 0.49-0.97).

Getting Someone Else to Buy Their Cigarettes

The odds of a regular smoker asking someone else to buy his/her cigarettes decreased with age (OR 0.55, 95% CI 0.51-0.61), and males were less likely than females to ask someone else to buy their cigarettes (OR 0.49, 95% CI 0.39-0.61). The more frequently that regular smokers are asked their age when trying to buy cigarettes, the more likely they are to get someone else to buy their cigarettes (OR 1.51, 95% CI 1.40-1.62).

Buying Their Cigarettes from a Friend

The odds of a regular smoker buying his/her cigarettes from a friend decreased with age (OR 0.81, 95% CI 0.69-0.94), or if he/she had a mother who smoked (OR 0.58, 95% CI 0.38-0.90). The more frequently regular smokers are asked their age when trying to buy cigarettes, the more likely they are to buy their cigarettes from a friend (OR 1.18, 95% CI 1.02-1.35).

DISCUSSION

Consistent with existing literature,[8-11] the underage youth in this study commonly accessed tobacco from both retailers and social sources. Considering that we only asked youth about how they *usually* get their cigarettes, the actual numbers of youth who have purchased their own cigarettes or who have used a social source to purchase cigarettes are probably even larger. Based on the evidence, existing point-of-sale access restrictions appear to be undermined by both poor retailer compliance and by youth buying cigarettes from friends and adults.

Regardless of smoking intensity, youth who are frequently asked their age during purchase attempts are more likely to get their cigarettes from social sources.[8-10,18,19] It appears that retailer compliance interventions may have the unintended consequence of getting youth to shift their source of cigarettes from retailers to social sources, rather than actually decreasing access.[11] For instance, it has been found that almost one third of adults approached by youth and asked to purchase cigarettes will do so.[13] New interventions that also target the social sources youth use to get cigarettes may be required, such as a community-based intervention designed to deter adults from buying cigarettes for youth (e.g., enforcing penalties for purchasing tobacco for underage youth). Additional research in this area is required.

Older youth smokers, regardless of their smoking intensity, tend to buy their own cigarettes and are less likely to rely on social sources.[10,20,21] It is possible that older underage youth might find it easier to buy their own cigarettes since they are not asked for age identification when purchasing tobacco as frequently as younger underage youth.[22] It might also be a function of the familiarity effect; older youth smokers tend to smoke more frequently than younger smokers, making them more familiar to tobacco retailers and, hence, more likely to be sold tobacco illegally.[3,23]

Overall, the smoking behaviour of friends and family members had little influence on the cigarette access behaviour of youth. Considering that youth were asked about their *usual* source for *buying* cigarettes, it is possible that the importance of friends and family members as social sources for cigarettes may have been overlooked. For instance, youth smokers commonly report exchanging cigarettes for free with friends,[9,10,21,22] or report stealing cigarettes from family members,[20] especially among occasional smokers.[8]

Limitations

First, the data used in the present study were cross-sectional, so causal relationships can not be inferred. Second, since the present study was a secondary data analysis of an existing data set, data were not available for all of the measures that would have been examined in the 'ideal' study (e.g., disposable income or socio-economic status), so some important relationships may have been overlooked. For instance, since students were only asked to identify how they *usually* obtain cigarettes, it does not necessarily mean that the student uses that source exclusively. In addition, data were not available to determine if youth were successful at buying cigarettes when they were asked their age, if youth were required to show photo identification to verify their age when asked, or who youth would buy their cigarettes from if they didn't buy their own or buy them from friends (e.g., stranger or family member). Third, these SSP data were based on self-reports, so the validity of the responses cannot be guaranteed.

Implications for research and practice

There is a large population of underage youth who successfully purchase their own cigarettes from retailers. Additional research is required to understand either the mechanisms underage youth use to identify non-compliant retailers, or the methods they use to purchase tobacco from retailers illegally. There is also a large population of underage youth who obtain their cigarettes from social sources. Research is required to develop and evaluate interventions designed to both inhibit the social exchange of cigarettes among youth and deter adults from purchasing cigarettes illegally for underage youth.

TABLE III

Logistic Regression: Predictors of Different Access Behaviours Among Regular Smokers (n=2,050)

Parameter	Standardized Beta (S.E.)	Alpha	Odds Ratio (95% CI)
Usually Buys Their Own Cigarettes*			
Demographic Characteristics			
Gender (Male)	0.49 (0.10)	p<0.001	1.63 (1.33, 1.99)
Age	0.64 (0.04)	p<0.001	1.89 (1.74, 2.06)
Social Influences			
Mother smokes	-0.08 (0.11)	p<0.486	0.93 (0.75, 1.15)
Father smokes	-0.04 (0.11)	p<0.758	0.97 (0.77, 1.21)
Older sibling(s) smoke	-0.37 (0.18)	p<0.034	0.69 (0.49, 0.97)
Number of close friends who smoke	-0.01 (0.04)	p<0.928	1.00 (0.92, 1.08)
Frequency of being asked their age when trying to buy cigarettes	-0.36 (0.04)	p<0.001	0.70 (0.65, 0.75)
Usually Gets Someone Else to Buy Their Cigarettes†			
Demographic Characteristics			
Gender (Male)	-0.72 (0.11)	p<0.001	0.49 (0.39, 0.61)
Age	-0.59 (0.05)	p<0.001	0.55 (0.51, 0.61)
Social Influences			
Mother smokes	0.21 (0.12)	p<0.081	1.23 (0.98, 1.56)
Father smokes	0.18 (0.13)	p<0.160	1.20 (0.93, 1.54)
Older sibling(s) smoke	0.24 (0.19)	p<0.203	1.28 (0.88, 1.86)
Number of close friends who smoke	-0.01 (0.04)	p<0.945	1.00 (0.92, 1.09)
Frequency of being asked their age when trying to buy cigarettes	0.41 (0.04)	p<0.001	1.51 (1.40, 1.62)
Usually Buys Their Cigarettes from a Friend‡			
Demographic Characteristics			
Gender (Male)	0.39 (0.23)	p<0.087	1.48 (0.95, 2.32)
Age	-0.21 (0.08)	p<0.006	0.81 (0.69, 0.94)
Social Influences			
Mother smokes	-0.54 (0.22)	p<0.016	0.58 (0.38, 0.90)
Father smokes	0.07 (0.24)	p<0.761	1.08 (0.67, 1.72)
Older sibling(s) smoke	0.14 (0.36)	p<0.710	1.15 (0.56, 2.34)
Number of close friends who smoke	-0.04 (0.08)	p<0.596	0.96 (0.82, 1.12)
Frequency of being asked their age when trying to buy cigarettes	0.16 (0.07)	p<0.022	1.18 (1.02, 1.35)

SE = Standard Error CI = Confidence Interval

* Buys their own cigarettes (n=1,349) vs. Does not buy their own cigarettes (n=701); *c* statistic = 0.75

† Gets someone else to buy their cigarettes (n=503) vs. Does not get someone else to buy their cigarettes (n=1,547); *c* statistic = 0.76

‡ Gets a friend to buy their cigarettes (n=90) vs. Does not get a friend to buy their cigarettes (n=1,960); *c* statistic = 0.65

CONCLUSION

In their current form, point-of-sale access restrictions are insufficient to prevent youth from acquiring cigarettes. Since youth commonly acquire cigarettes from both commercial and social sources, a more comprehensive approach for restricting access is required. By understanding the characteristics of youth smokers that predict different tobacco access behaviours, more effective access restriction policies and interventions can be designed and targeted to smoking youth and the people who purchase tobacco for underage youth.

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RÉSUMÉ

Contexte : Pour établir des mesures de restriction efficaces, il est essentiel de déterminer comment les mineurs se procurent des cigarettes. La présente étude visait à examiner les caractéristiques prédictives des modes d'accès aux cigarettes des mineurs, soit par l'achat direct, auprès d'amis ou par la sollicitation des services d'une autre personne.

Méthodes : On a réalisé des analyses de régression logistiques pour examiner les variables prédictives des trois différents modes d'accès au tabac à l'égard de 737 mineurs, qui fument à l'occasion, et 2 050 mineurs qui fument chaque jour.

Résultats : On constate que moins d'une fois sur deux, les points de vente de cigarettes demandent l'âge des mineurs qui tentent de se procurer du tabac. Les fumeurs occasionnels achètent leurs cigarettes auprès d'amis (59,5 %) et la plupart des fumeurs réguliers achètent eux-mêmes leurs cigarettes (59,8 %). Les fumeurs occasionnels étaient moins susceptibles d'acheter eux-mêmes leurs cigarettes (RC 0,85) et ils étaient davantage susceptibles de demander à une autre personne de leur en acheter (RC 1,24) si on leur demandait souvent leur âge lors de tentatives d'achat de cigarettes. Les fumeurs réguliers étaient également moins susceptibles d'acheter eux-mêmes leurs cigarettes (RC 0,70) et davantage susceptibles de demander à une autre personne (RC 1,51) ou à un ami (RC 1,18) de les acheter à leur place si on leur demandait souvent leur âge lors de tentatives d'achat de cigarettes.

Interprétation : Les mesures restrictives aux points d'accès ne suffisent pas à empêcher les mineurs d'acheter des cigarettes parce qu'ils peuvent s'en procurer auprès de leur réseau social. Il faut donc adopter une approche globale pour limiter l'accès, une approche qui ciblera tant les mineurs que les personnes qui achètent des cigarettes pour les mineurs.