

Smoking is the leading cause of preventable death in this country. While smoking rates are decreasing, there are increasing differences in class and income between smokers and non-smokers. These differences are making existing health inequalities even worse. Previous research suggests that neighborhood differences could play a large role in people's decisions to smoke.

One possibility is the power of a strong social bond in a neighborhood, one particular type of which is called collective efficacy. The term describes the willingness of neighbors to intervene in situations that might threaten the well-being of others (for example, if there was a fight in front of your house, how likely is it that your neighbors would break it up?). In the past, research has found that a greater sense of collective efficacy was associated with a wide range of positive health behaviors, like quitting smoking.

We examined the connection between collective efficacy and smoking. In the fall of 2009, a health survey was conducted by the Community Alliance for Research and Engagement in six neighborhoods in New Haven. The sense of collective efficacy in their neighborhood among 1,192 adults was scored from 1 (low perceived neighborhood collective efficacy) to 5 (high collective efficacy) and compared with whether or not that person smoked daily, and how many cigarettes they smoked.

Key Findings

- Smoking rates in these six neighborhoods is twice the national average
- Those with greater collective efficacy:
 - » Less likely to be daily smokers; and
 - » Smoked fewer cigarettes, if daily smokers

Results

High Daily Smoking Rates



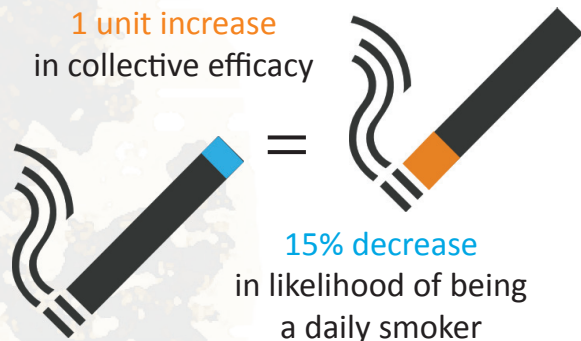
1.5 in 10 in the US



3 in 10 in New Haven sample

We also found that a greater sense of collective efficacy in one's neighborhood was significantly associated with a lower chance of being a daily tobacco smoker in our sample. This finding was the same regardless of what gender, race, age, or how educated the person was. We also found that among people who reported smoking daily, every one-unit increase in our collective efficacy scale was associated with smoking 0.6 fewer cigarettes per day.

1 unit increase
in collective efficacy



The daily smokers smoke on average a half a pack a day

Recommendations

Programs trying to reduce smoking may be even more successful if they encourage smoking cessation while also fostering neighborhood collective efficacy. This approach will have the added benefit of residents working together on smoking and other health threats to their community.