



## **The Role of Digital Media and Peer Influence on Adolescent Smoking Behavior: A Critical Analysis of Intervention Strategies**

**Neha Chaudhary**

BHCM, Atharva Business College, Kathmandu, Nepal

[nehachaudhary2059@gmail.com](mailto:nehachaudhary2059@gmail.com)

<https://orcid.org/0009-0008-2567-9933>

**Manika Jatal\***

BHCM, Atharva Business College, Kathmandu, Nepal

[manikajatal@gmail.com](mailto:manikajatal@gmail.com)

<https://orcid.org/0009-0008-1635-5339>

### **Corresponding Author\***

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### **Abstract**

This study is an attempt to explore perceptions and attitudes toward smoking amongst adolescents, where the main objective of the research is to explore the factors that help in understanding how their views and behavior are shaped. This study garnered data through questionnaires given to adolescents between the ages of 10-20, representing varied walks of life. The results bring out intricate interplays of social, psychological, and environmental factors that shape adolescent perceptions. Peer pressure, media representation, and familial attitudes emerge as potent determinant factors. The research therefore stresses the implementation of focused educational programs and policies aimed at dispelling myths in order to reduce smoking initiation rates during this period. Recommendations for further research and intervention are discussed here, which would form the foundation of comprehensive anti-smoking strategies relevant for this most vulnerable age group.

**Keywords:** Adolescent smoking, Peer pressure, Media influence, Smoking behavior, Social determinants



## **Introduction**

Adolescence is the development period which is characterized by physical, emotional and social changes. This is the phase of the life which is considered to be engaging in the risky behavior including smoking. Understanding adolescent's perceptions towards smoking is important, as these perceptions can influence their decision to start or continue smoking. Knowing the perceptions of adolescence towards smoking is essential for designing effective interventions. Perceptions about the risks and benefits of smoking, social norms, and personal beliefs play a crucial role in shaping smoking behaviors (Neupane & Lourdasamy, 2024). By exploring these perceptions, this study aims to provide insights that can inform public health strategies, policy-making, and educational efforts to reduce smoking initiation and prevalence among adolescents.

Globally, smoking is a leading cause of preventable diseases and premature deaths. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that nearly 90% of adult smokers began smoking before the age of 18, highlighting the importance of addressing smoking behaviors during adolescence (Neupane D. , 2014; Neupane D. , 2019). The prevalence of smoking among adolescents varies by region, influenced by cultural, socioeconomic, and policy factors. In many countries, despite declining trends in adult smoking rates, adolescent smoking rates remain concerning high.

This study seeks to investigate adolescent's perceptions towards smoking, including their awareness of health risks, the influence of social and environmental factors. The findings will contribute to the broader understanding of adolescent smoking behaviors and support the development of targeted interventions to curb smoking among young people.

## **Prevalence of smoking in the world and Nepal**

### **In world**

The prevalence of tobacco use in adolescents in 133 countries was 19.33%, and it ranged from 1.5% to 65.5%. There were 23.29% male and 15.35% female smoker adolescents in these countries ( $p < 0.001$ ). In low-income countries, 18.48% of male and 11.41% of female adolescents consumed tobacco ( $p 0.006$ ). (Nazir, Ansari, & Abbasi, 2019)

### **In Nepal**

Both smoking and the use of smokeless tobacco are common practices in Nepal with 28.3% of adults consuming some form of tobacco in Nepal. Out of smokeless tobacco, chewing tobacco is the most common form of tobacco use Bedi use is also common among Nepalese women. The Act against Tobacco was established in 2011, which prohibits the sale of tobacco use to minors and pregnant women. (Shrestha, Mehata, Pradhan, Joshi, & Mishra, 2019)

### **Statement of the problem**

In between 1990 and 2015, the age-standardized prevalence of daily tobacco smoking decreased by 33% in males, 48% in females and 28% in both. By 2017, the age-standardized mortality rate and DALYs attributable to tobacco use, including any form, decreased by 34%



and 41%, respectively, with tobacco smoking having the most contribution. However, the absolute number of deaths and DALYs increased by 39% and 3%, respectively. An increasing rate of deaths and DALYs attributable to tobacco was noted with an increase in age. Non-communicable diseases were responsible for most deaths and disabilities attributable to tobacco use. (Shrestha, Phuyal, Gautam, Mulmi, & PMS, 2021)

### **Significance of the study**

- To understand the perception which can help to identify the factors that contributes in smoking initiation.s
- Development of targeted prevention program that aimed at reducing smoking rates among adolescents.
- Provide guidance to the design of educational campaigns in school and communities to change the attitude and appeal of the smoking.
- Contribute to the broader understanding of societal norms and peers influences that shapes the adolescents behavior.

### **Objectives**

- To find out the level of awareness among adolescents regarding the health risk associated with smoking.
- Identify the factors that influence the adolescent perception and attitude towards smoking.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Title: Perceptions of Smoking-Related Risks and Benefits as Predictors of Adolescent Smoking Initiation**

The objective of this article is to directly test whether smoking-related perceptions predict smoking initiation among adolescents. The results were found that Adolescents who held the lowest perceptions of long-term smoking-related risks were 3.64 times more likely to start smoking than were adolescents who held the highest perceptions of risk. Adolescents who held the lowest perceptions of short-term smoking-related risks were 2.68 times more likely to initiate. (Song, et al., 2009)

#### **Title: Perceived risks and benefits of smoking: differences among adolescents with different smoking experiences and intentions**

According to this article explanations of adolescent smoking often make reference to adolescents' beliefs that they are invulnerable to harm. However, empirical examination of whether adolescents do acknowledge risks. Further, few studies have considered perceived benefits in adolescents' behavioral decisions. This study examined perceived smoking-related physical and social risks and benefits between adolescents who have vs. have not smoked and do vs. do not intend to smoke. The result found after the survey was done was Adolescent smokers and those who intend to smoke estimated their chance of experiencing a smoking-



related negative outcome as less likely than did nonsmokers and non-intenders. Smokers and intenders also reported the chance of addiction as less likely than did others. In contrast, adolescent smokers and intenders perceived the chance of experiencing a smoking-related benefit as more likely than did nonsmokers and non-intenders. (Halpern-Felsher, Michael, Rhonda, & Rubinstein, 2004)

**Title: Factors Influencing Adolescents' Decision Not to Smoke**

According to this study the adolescents ultimately make their own decisions to smoke or not to smoke, social, economic, and environmental circumstances shape their choices. Most research on prevention of youth tobacco use focuses on predictors of smoking initiation. In this study, they explored nonsmoking attitudes, beliefs, and norms from the perspective of 16–17-year-old nonsmokers. A health behavior framework guided the development of semi structured questions on attitudes, beliefs, and norms associated with nonsmoking, used in eight in-depth group interviews. After the survey it is found that concerns for health and addiction, a positive self-image, and perceived confidence, emerged as factors affecting participants' decisions not to smoke. The approval of parents and friends, and personal beliefs further reinforced adolescents' nonsmoking decisions. (Pamela A. Kulbok, 2008)

**Title: Smoking and self-perception in secondary school students**

Guided by the influence of presumed influence model, this study focuses on the direct and mediating roles of adolescent perceived media influence on peers—i.e., perceptions about how much peers are influenced by antismoking messages—in predicting adolescent smoking attitudes and behavior. Analysis of two-wave panel data indicates that adolescents' perceived media influence on peers at Time 2 directly influenced their smoking attitudes and behavior at Time 2 and appeared to serve as a causal bridge for the variable at Time 1. The exposure to antismoking campaigns seems to achieve the desired outcome indirectly through perceived media influence on peers (Paek, Gunther, Mcleod, & Hove, 2011).

**Methods and Materials**

**Introduction**

The research methodology for this study involves a mixed methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques. This technique helps to provide comprehensive understanding of the behavior and attitude of adolescent regarding smoking. This study is conducted in several phase, consist of literature review, data collection and its analysis.

**Research Design**

This study includes the cross-sectional research design to understand adolescents' perception towards smoking at a specific point in time. This involves administering a structured questionnaire to the large number of sample of adolescents to gather quantitative data.



### **Setting of the Study**

This study is conducted in several schools and high school within urban and rural area. This setting is chosen to ensure a diverse sample of adolescents from different socio-economic backgrounds. Permission were taken from the respective schools and high school.

### **Study Population**

The study population consists of adolescents aged 10 to 20 years. Participants were selected by using a stratified random sampling technique to ensure representation across different age groups.

### **Sample size**

The sample size for this study is 151 adolescents aged 10-20 years. This size is chosen to ensure a representative sample while being manageable in terms of data collection and analysis.

### **Criteria for Sample Selection**

- Adolescents aged 10-20 years.
- Both male and female adolescents
- Obtain from school or college.
- Willing to participate and provide informed consent.

### **Sampling Technique**

The study is enrolled in a stratified random sampling technique. This method ensures that subgroups such as age, gender, and school type (public vs. private) are adequately represented in the sample.

### **Data Collection Tool**

The data collection tool is a structured questionnaire. This questionnaire is developed specifically for this study to assess adolescents' perceptions, knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors towards smoking.

### **Description of the Tool**

The questionnaire will consist of three sections:

- **Demographic Information:** Age
- **Knowledge about Smoking:** Questions assessing understanding of the health risks and social consequences of smoking.
- **Attitudes towards Smoking:** Likert scale questions measuring attitudes towards smoking, including perceived benefits and risks.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

- **Ethical Approval:** Obtain approval from the relevant ethics committee.
- **Consent:** provide consent information to participant

### **Plan of Analysis**

Data are analyzed using statistical methods. Descriptive statistical summarize the data, and inferential statistical explored the relation between variables and tested hypothesis.

## Results and Analysis

### Demographic Analysis

The given table shows the demographic information of respondents

**Table 1 Age of respondents**

How old are you?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	10-15	55	36.4	36.4	36.4
	15-20	96	63.6	63.6	100.0
	Total	151	100.0	100.0	

There are altogether 151 respondents in this survey. All of them are between 10-20 years. According to the data 36.4% of respondent are between 10-15 years and 63.6% of respondents are between 15-20 years.

### Data presentation and analysis

**Table 4.2 Data presentation and analysis**

		Count	Layer N %
Smoking makes people look cool.	Strongly disagree	85	56.3%
	Disagree	50	33.1%
	Neutral	7	4.6%
	Agree	8	5.3%
	Strongly Agree	1	0.7%
Total		151	100.0%
Smoking is harmful to one's health.	Strongly disagree	29	19.2%
	Disagree	6	4.0%
	Neutral	4	2.6%
	Agree	44	29.1%
	Strongly Agree	68	45.0%
Total		151	100.0%
Smoking helps reduce stress.	Strongly disagree	49	32.5%
	Disagree	59	39.1%
	Neutral	20	13.2%



	Agree	16	10.6%
	Strongly Agree	7	4.6%
	Total	151	100.0%
Smoking is addictive.	Strongly disagree	5	3.3%
	Disagree	3	2.0%
	Neutral	14	9.3%
	Agree	93	61.6%
	Strongly Agree	36	23.8%
	Total	151	100.0%
Smoking is a waste of money.	Strongly disagree	7	4.6%
	Disagree	2	1.3%
	Neutral	4	2.6%
	Agree	57	37.7%
	Strongly Agree	81	53.6%
	Total	151	100.0%
Smoking is a personal choice and doesn't affect others.	Strongly disagree	39	25.8%
	Disagree	78	51.7%
	Neutral	14	9.3%
	Agree	17	11.3%
	Strongly Agree	3	2.0%
	Total	151	100.0%
Smoking makes people feel more confident.	Strongly disagree	30	19.9%
	Disagree	77	51.0%
	Neutral	32	21.2%
	Agree	9	6.0%
	Strongly Agree	3	2.0%
	Total	151	100.0%
Smoking is a habit that can be easily quit.	Strongly disagree	26	17.2%
	Disagree	65	43.0%
	Neutral	20	13.2%
	Agree	35	23.2%
	Strongly Agree	5	3.3%
	Total	151	100.0%



Smoking is a way to fit in with peers.	Strongly disagree	24	15.9%
	Disagree	76	50.3%
	Neutral	33	21.9%
	Agree	15	9.9%
	Strongly Agree	3	2.0%
	Total	151	100.0%
Smoking is a sign of rebellion against authority.	Strongly disagree	20	13.2%
	Disagree	41	27.2%
	Neutral	45	29.8%
	Agree	39	25.8%
	Strongly Agree	6	4.0%
	Total	151	100.0%
Smoking causes lung cancer.	Strongly disagree	6	4.0%
	Disagree	1	0.7%
	Neutral	4	2.6%
	Agree	43	28.5%
	Strongly Agree	97	64.2%
	Total	151	100.0%
Smoking is a way to cope with difficult emotions.	Strongly disagree	17	11.3%
	Disagree	76	50.3%
	Neutral	32	21.2%
	Agree	17	11.3%
	Strongly Agree	9	6.0%
	Total	151	100.0%
Smoking is socially acceptable among teenagers.	Strongly disagree	35	23.2%
	Disagree	61	40.4%
	Neutral	15	9.9%
	Agree	32	21.2%
	Strongly Agree	8	5.3%
	Total	151	100.0%
Smoking can cause heart diseases.	Strongly disagree	5	3.3%
	Disagree	2	1.3%
	Neutral	11	7.3%





	Agree	64	42.4%
	Strongly Agree	69	45.7%
	Total	151	100.0%
Smoking is a form of self-expression.	Strongly disagree	20	13.2%
	Disagree	69	45.7%
	Neutral	37	24.5%
	Agree	18	11.9%
	Strongly Agree	7	4.6%
	Total	151	100.0%
Smoking is harmful to the environment.	Strongly disagree	5	3.3%
	Disagree	3	2.0%
	Neutral	4	2.6%
	Agree	50	33.1%
	Strongly Agree	89	58.9%
	Total	151	100.0%
Smoking makes people more attractive.	Strongly disagree	45	29.8%
	Disagree	83	55.0%
	Neutral	10	6.6%
	Agree	9	6.0%
	Strongly Agree	4	2.6%
	Total	151	100.0%
Smoking is portrayed positively in media.	Strongly disagree	22	14.6%
	Disagree	61	40.4%
	Neutral	34	22.5%
	Agree	29	19.2%
	Strongly Agree	5	3.3%
	Total	151	100.0%
Smoking is a sign of maturity.	Strongly disagree	40	26.5%
	Disagree	78	51.7%
	Neutral	16	10.6%
	Agree	14	9.3%
	Strongly Agree	3	2.0%
	Total	151	100.0%



Smoking should be banned in public places.	Strongly disagree	6	4.0%
	Disagree	3	2.0%
	Neutral	2	1.3%
	Agree	34	22.5%
	Strongly Agree	106	70.2%
	Total	151	100.0%

The respondent were asked "Smoking makes people look cool", out of 151 respondents, 85 (56.3%) respondents strongly disagree, 50(33.1) % replied disagree, 7(4.6)% replied neutral. 8(5.3) % replied agree, 1(0.7)%replied strongly agree. It shows that most of the respondent believes that people look cool while smoking.

For the next question" Smoking is harmful to one's health", among the 151 respondents, 29(19.2) % respondents with strongly disagree, 6(4.0)% replied disagree, 4(2.6)% replied neutral. 44(29.1)% replied agree, 68(45.0)%replied strongly agree. It shows that more respondents are aware of bad effect of smoking on one's health.

For the question "smoking helps reduces stress", out of 151 respondents, 49(32.5%) respondents strongly disagree, 59(39.1)% replied disagree, 20(13.2)% replied neutral. 16(10.6)% replied agree, 7(4.6)% replied strongly agree. This shows that least of the respondents feel smoking reduce stress.

For another question "smoking is addictive", out of 151 respondents 5(3.3%) respondents strongly disagree, 3(2.0)% replied disagree, 14(9.3%) replied neutral, 93(61.6)% replied agree, 36(23.8)% replied strongly agree. This shows that maximum of the respondent agree that smoking is addictive.

For another question "smoking is the waste of money", out of 151 respondents 7(4.6%) respondents strongly disagree, 2(1.3)% replied disagree, 4(2.6%) replied neutral, 57(37.7)% replied agree, 81(53.6)% replied strongly agree. This shows more respondents are strongly agreed with the question.

For the next question "smoking is the personal choice and does not affect others", among the 151 respondents, 39(25.8)% respondents with strongly disagree, 78(1.7)% replied disagree, 14(9.3)% replied neutral. 17(11.3)% replied agree, 3(2.0)%replied strongly agree. It shows that most of respondent feels smoking isn't a personal choice and it do affect others.

Another question asked was "Smoking makes people feel more confident", out of 151 respondents, 30(19.9%) respondents strongly disagree, 77(51.0)% replied disagree, 32(21.2)% replied neutral. 9(6.0)% replied agree, 13(2.0)%replied strongly agree. It shows that very less respondents find smoking as a confident booster.

For the question "smoking is the habit that can be easily quit", out of 151 respondents, 26(17.2%) respondents strongly disagree, 65(43.0)% replied disagree, 20(13.2)% replied



neutral. 35(23.2)% replied agree, 5(3.3)% replied strongly agree. This shows that minimum number of adolescents thinks that smoking is easy to quit.

For the next question "Smoking is a way to fit in with peers", out of 151 respondents 24(15.9%) respondents strongly disagree, 76(50.3)% replied disagree, 33(21.9%) replied neutral, 15(9.9)% replied agree, 3(2.0)% replied strongly agree. This shows that only least respondents think smoking is way to fit in with peers.

For another question "Smoking is a sign of rebellion against authority.", out of 151 respondents 20(13.2%) respondents strongly disagree, 41(27.2)% replied disagree, 45(29.8%) replied neutral, 39(25.8)% replied agree, 6(4.0)% replied strongly agree. Most of the respondents shows neutral responses for this question.

For the question " Smoking causes lung cancer", out of 151 respondents, 6(4.0%) respondents strongly disagree, 1(0.7)% replied disagree, 4(2.6)% replied neutral. 43(28.5)% replied agree, 97(64.2)% replied strongly agree. This shows that most of the respondents believe that smoking causes cancer.

For the next question "smoking is a way to cope with difficult emotions ", out of 151 respondents 24(15.9%) respondents strongly disagree, 76(50.3)% replied disagree, 33(21.9%) replied neutral, 15(9.9)% replied agree, 3(2.0)% replied strongly agree. This shows that many of the respondents disagree that smoking is way to cope with difficult emotion.

Another question asked was "Smoking is socially acceptable among teenagers", out of 151 respondent 35(23.2%) respondents strongly disagree, 61(40.4)% replied disagree, 15(9.9)% replied neutral. 32(21.2)% replied agree, 8(5.3)%replied strongly agree. It shows that most of the respondents disagree with the statement.

For another question "Smoking can cause heart diseases", out of 151 respondents 5(3.3%) respondents strongly disagree, 2(1.3)% replied disagree, 11(7.3%) replied neutral, 64(42.4)% replied agree, 69(45.7)% replied strongly agree. It shows that maximum of the respondents believe smoking cause heart disease.

For the next question "Smoking is a form of self-expression.", out of 151 respondents 20(13.2%) respondents strongly disagree, 69(45.7)% replied disagree, 37(24.5%) replied neutral, 18(11.9)% replied agree, 7(4.6)% replied strongly agree. This shows that least of the total respondents strongly agreed with the question.

Another question asked was " Smoking is harmful to the environment", out of 151 respondents, 5(3.3%) respondents strongly disagree, 3(2.0)% replied disagree, 4(2.6)% replied neutral. 50(33.1)% replied agree, 89(58.9)%replied strongly agree. It shows that maximum number of respondent are aware about the impact of smoking on environment.

For the next question "Smoking makes people more attractive ", out of 151 respondents 45(29.8%) respondents strongly disagree, 83(55.0)% replied disagree, 10(6.6%) replied neutral, 9(6.0)% replied agree, 4(2.6)% replied strongly agree. This shows that least adolescents find people looks attractive while smoking.



For another question “Smoking is portrayed positively in media”, out of 151 respondents 22(14.6%) respondents strongly disagree, 61(40.4)% replied disagree, 34(22.5%) replied neutral, 29(19.2)% replied agree,5(3.3)% replied strongly agree. This shows that most of the adolescents believe media portrayed smoking negatively.

For another question “smoking is the sign of maturity”, out of 151 respondents 40(26.5)% respondents strongly disagree, 78(51.7)% replied disagree, 16(10.6%) replied neutral, 14(9.3)% replied agree, 3(2.0)% replied strongly agree. This shows that adolescents don’t think smoking as a sign of maturity.

For the next question "Smoking should be banned in public places ", among the 151 respondents,6(4.0)% respondents with strongly disagree, 3(2.0)% replied disagree, 2(1.3)% replied neutral. 34(22.5)% replied agree, 106(70.2)%replied strongly agree. It shows that maximum respondents strongly agree with the statement that is smoking should be banned in the public places.

## **Summary, Conclusion and Recommendation**

### **Summary**

This study investigates the perceptions of adolescents towards smoking, focusing on their attitudes, beliefs, and influences that contribute to smoking behaviors. Through a comprehensive survey distributed to a diverse group of adolescent aged 10 to 20, data was collected on various factors including peer pressure, awareness of health risks, and the impact of media. The findings reveal a complex interplay of social, psychological, and environmental factors that shape adolescents' views on smoking.

This research investigates adolescents' perceptions toward smoking based on responses from 151 participants. The study covers various aspects such as the perceived coolness associated with smoking, awareness of its health impacts, stress relief, addictiveness, financial implications, social and personal implications, and its association with confidence and rebellion. According to the data obtained the finding are like majority of the of respondents disagree or strongly disagree that smoking makes people look cool. A significant proportion i.e (74.1%) agreed or strongly agreed that smoking is harmful to one's health. Most respondents disagree or strongly disagree that smoking helps reduce stress. A large majority that is (85.4%) agreed or strongly agreed that smoking is addictive. A significant number of respondents (91.3%) agree or strongly agree. The majority that is (86.7%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that smoking is merely a personal choice and does not affect others. Most respondents (70.9%) disagree or strongly disagree that smoking makes people feel more confident. A substantial proportion (60.2%) disagree or strongly disagree smoking is a habit that can be easily quit. A majority that is (66.2%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that smoking is a way to fit in with peers. The large majority (85.4%) agree or strongly agree that smoking is addictive. The significant number of respondents that is (91.3%) agreed or strongly agreed. The majority that is (86.7%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that smoking is



merely a personal choice and does not affect others. Most respondents (70.9%) disagree or strongly disagree that smoking makes people feel more confident. A substantial proportion (60.2%) disagree or strongly disagree that smoking is a habit that can be easily quit. A majority (66.2%) disagree or strongly disagree that smoking is a way to fit in with peers. Responses were mixed, with 27.2% disagreeing, 29.8% neutral, and 29.8% agreeing that smoking is a sign of rebellion against authority. A significant majority (92.7%) agree or strongly agree that smoking causes lung cancer. Most respondents (66.2%) disagree or strongly disagree that smoking is a way to cope with difficult emotions. A majority (63.6%) disagree or strongly disagree that smoking is socially acceptable among teenagers. A large proportion (88.1%) agree or strongly agree that smoking can cause heart diseases. Most respondents (58.9%) disagree or strongly disagree that smoking is a form of self-expression.

### **Conclusion**

Most adolescents have negative views about smoking in several dimensions as illustrated by the study. They do not think smoking is awesome or confidence booster, and neither it helps to reduce anxiety nor ease of increase difficult emotions according to their view. Moreover, risk awareness of different diseases like lung cancer and heart diseases are also common among young people. Furthermore, youth in general see smoking as an addictive habit that eats into their pockets. In addition, they accept this fact that it is a social phenomena rather than just being individual choice.

The findings imply that anti-smoking sentiment prevails among teenagers who are conscious about the negative impacts and societal outcomes caused by smoking. This knowledge can help healthcare providers and policy makers when designing focused interventions and education programs aimed at lowering rates of smoking among adolescents further.

### **Recommendation**

- It would be better if implementation of comprehensive smoking education programs in schools to inform adolescents about the health risks and long-term consequences of smoking.
- It would be better if parents encourage to discuss the dangers of smoking with their children and to set a non-smoking example at home.
- It would be better if accessible resources is provided for adolescents who want to quit smoking, including counseling and support groups.
- It would be better if public health campaigns focus on the long-term health risks of smoking, using relatable and impactful messages.
- It would be better if policy makers enforce stricter regulations on tobacco advertising, especially in media frequented by adolescents
- It would be better if healthcare providers create more youth-friendly resources and support systems to educate adolescents about smoking.
- It would be better if communities provide more recreational and educational activities that engage adolescents in healthy lifestyles, reducing the appeal of smoking.



- It would be better if research continues to explore the underlying reasons why adolescents start smoking to develop targeted interventions.
- It would be better if peer-led initiatives are encouraged, where adolescents can influence their peers through positive role modeling and support.
- It would be better if schools and communities create a supportive environment that promotes smoke-free lifestyles and provides assistance to those trying to quit.
- It would be better if social media platforms increase their efforts to monitor and restrict tobacco-related content that might influence adolescents.

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