

The influence of cigarette-smoking when choosing a partner for a casual, intimate relationship

La influencia de fumar cigarrillos en la elección de pareja para una relación íntima y ocasional

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Dear Editor,
The study of the effect that smoking may have on casual, intimate relationships is of great interest as it may prove to be a useful tool in the prevention and treatment of smoking. Traditionally, smoking cigarettes has been considered a useful tool when approaching the opposite sex (Baek and Mayer, 2010). However, over the last years, educational campaigns and changes in legislation may have altered perception of the effect of tobacco on the quality and healthiness of the relationship between a couple.

The aim of this study is to analyse whether the fact that the potential partner is or is not a smoker affects intentions to maintain a casual, intimate relationship. Gender and age influence choice of a sporadic partner is also analysed.

The participants were 597 subjects (293 non-smokers, 163 ex-smokers and 141 smokers). The mean age of the total sample was 26 (25 for smokers and non-smokers, and 28 for ex-smokers). Age range was from 16 to 68 years of age. Sixty-two percent were women and 38% men. Fifty-nine percent had basic secondary studies, 30% had finished school or were at university and 11.40% had university degrees.

Three different *ad hoc* questionnaires were used for each of the groups of participants. They included questions about sociodemographic characteristics and about the effect of cigarette-smoking when choosing a partner for a casual, intimate relationship. The Questionnaires were

applied over the Internet, through the “snowball method”, using Google Forms and sent via the social networks Facebook and WhatsApp. The survey was totally anonymous and participation voluntary, as this method guarantees.

The results showed that 3.5% of the smokers, 26.8% of the ex-smokers and 41.6% of the non-smokers affirmed that the fact that a person smoked would have a negative influence on them when it came to initiating a casual, intimate relationship. Eleven percent of the smokers, 6.2% of the non-smokers and 9.1% of the ex-smokers affirmed that they would prefer a smoker when maintaining a casual, intimate relationships. There are statistically significant differences between smokers and non-smokers ($\chi^2=66.72$, $p<0.001$), between ex-smokers and non-smokers ($\chi^2=30.74$, $p<0.001$), and between smokers and ex-smokers ($\chi^2=9.70$, $p=0.002$) regarding their negative attitude towards maintaining a casual, intimate relationship with a person who smokes. The analyses of a negative attitude towards smokers in relation to sex and age (over and under 30 years of age) did not show statistically significant differences ($p>.05$).

This is the first study to analyse whether the fact that a person smokes plays a role in the likelihood of that person being chosen as a partner for a casual, intimate relationship. The results showed that, in comparison to smokers, non-smokers and ex-smokers were more reluctant to maintain casual, intimate relationships with people who smoke. The negative attitude towards smoking was similar across gender and age. Preference for smokers when maintaining

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a casual intimate relationship was very low and similar in all groups of participants. Less than 11% of participants preferred a smoker, even if they were smokers themselves.

With regard to the reasons given by non-smokers and ex-smokers to justify their initial negative attitude towards maintaining casual relationships with someone who smoked, 88.2% indicated that what most bothered them was bad breath, followed by 78.7% who referred to the smell of tobacco, 25% to tobacco smoke and 6% to having to go outside premises to smoke.

These results underline how smoking, which for many years was considered to have a certain sex appeal, as the publicity was keen to show (Baek and Mayer, 2010), now appears not only to be beginning to lose this value but, furthermore, is starting to be perceived as an obstacle as far as intimate relationships are concerned. Smoking is no longer regarded to be attractive. Hygiene (the smell of tobacco, bad breath), and also social reasons (having to accompany the smoker outside a premises to smoke) explain this trend. The results also showed that the reluctance to maintain relationships with people who smoke was similar in men and women.

This study has direct implications for prevention and treatment of smoking. It is important that adolescents should be made aware of this issue, and the fact that smoking impedes the establishing of casual intimate relationships could be incorporated into the list of drawbacks associated with smoking.

Limitations of this study are that the sample was limited to over-18-year-olds and did not include adolescents, and that the snowball method does not always guarantee that the sample will be sufficiently representative.

Even with these limitations,, the results of this study show the existence of a further argument that can be used in the fight against smoking, based on the potential rejection that smoking appears to cause with regard to initiating intimate relationships.

Conflict of Interest

No conflict declared.

References

- Baek, T. H. & Mayer, M. (2010). Sexual Imagery in Cigarette Advertising Before and After the Master Settlement Agreement. *Health Communication*, 25, 747-757. doi:10.1080/10410236.2010.521917.