

SNAPS (Social Network Analysis of Peers and Smoking in adolescence)

Research team

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The study

Smoking is a major problem in the UK and it is estimated that smoking contributes to around 114,000 deaths each year. The problem is especially acute among teenagers, with 82% of smoking starting during this time. Deterring young people from taking up smoking is difficult; however recent studies have identified the importance of influential friends and friendship groups in the development of anti-smoking norms.

During the, Medical Research Council-funded, A Stop Smoking in Schools Trial ([ASSIST](#)), a large longitudinal dataset, including information on teenage smoking behaviour and their friendship networks was collected. The current MRC-funded study will involve secondary analysis of these data which were collected from over 10,000 students from more than 57 schools.

The aim of the study is to answer a number of research questions relating to the uptake and maintenance of smoking behaviour in adolescence, and will extend the work carried out in the Peer Influence and Peer Selection ([PIPS](#)) study which is also being conducted at CISHE. It will provide an important insight into the complex interplay between peer relationships and smoking behaviour that will contribute to understanding, theoretical development, and improved design and targeting of interventions to combat smoking in adolescence.

This study will investigate whether smokers choose other smokers to be friends, or whether within friendship groups the uptake of smoking is through another social mechanism such as imitation or overt pressure. Other analyses will consider whether personal network characteristics such as popularity affect smoking behaviour, and whether an individual's position in their social network, for example, as a group member or isolate, affects their propensity to smoke. At other levels, the characteristics of the friendship tie, the characteristics of the friends respondents associate with, and the characteristics of the school social networks will be considered.

Amongst other methods, the study will apply recent developments in the dynamic analysis of social networks and behaviour, and will, amongst other methods utilise a recently developed statistical modelling program, [SIENA](#) (Simulation Investigation for Empirical Network Analysis).

This study is part of the European Collaborative Research Project ([ECRP](#)) Dynamics of actors and networks across levels: individuals, groups, organizations, and social settings led by Professor Tom Snijders which involves research teams in the Netherlands, Wales, Germany, Spain,

Switzerland, Sweden and France. Further details of the collaboration will become available in the near future.

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