

Behavioral Symptoms May Indicate Increased Smoking Risk Among Adolescents

Adolescents who show a high level of aggression and hyperactivity may be at greater risk for smoking cigarettes than those who do not present these behavioral symptoms, according to a study by researchers at NIDA's Intramural Research Program, the University of California, Los Angeles, and the National Institute of Mental Health.

The researchers recruited 59 adolescents ages 12 to 14 in the Baltimore-Washington, DC area, with no history of substance use, to participate in the study. At the beginning of the study, the adolescents and their parents completed standardized questionnaires to assess the adolescents' aggression, hyperactivity, conduct problems, inattention, impulsivity, anxiety/depression, and social problems. Followup interviews were conducted at 4-month intervals for the next 2 years, and researchers recorded if and when the adolescents began smoking as well as how often they smoked. Family, school, social functioning, and substance use status also were updated.

The researchers found that more than 30 percent of the adolescents began smoking an average of 19 months after the study began. Adolescents who started smoking were more aggressive, more hyperactive, and tended to have more conduct problems upon entering the study than the adolescents who did not smoke.

WHAT IT MEANS: These findings indicate that the severity of certain behavioral symptoms, such as aggression and hyperactivity, may help identify adolescents who are at higher risk of smoking at a young age. Determining risk factors for smoking among adolescents may aid in the development and implementation of more effective prevention programs.

Lead investigators Drs. Monique Ernst and Michelle K. Leff published this study in the September 2003 issue of the *Journal of Child and Adolescent Substance Abuse*. It was funded by NIDA and the American Psychiatric Association's Drug Abuse Research Scholars Program in Psychiatry.