

RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Young women and cigarettes

Dr Emilee Gilbert, from the School of Social Sciences and Psychology and the Centre for Health Research, is leading an investigation into why young women smoke despite knowing the serious health risks. The project, which is supported by the Australian Research Council Discovery Project, aims to increase understanding of why young women are resistant to the anti-smoking message. The other investigators are Professor Jane Ussher and Associate Professor Janette Perz.

'Cigarette smoking has serious health effects unique to women, with young women specifically at risk,' says Dr Gilbert. 'While anti-smoking policies have reduced the overall rate of smoking, they have been less effective at reducing rates of smoking among young women, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, those who are socially marginalised, and those from indigenous and culturally and linguistically diverse communities.'

Cigarette smoking is the single largest preventable cause of disease and premature death in Australia, with the highest rate of smoking found in young people aged 20-29 years and with more young women than men taking up smoking. This is of particular concern because young women are subject to a unique range of smoking-related health risks, including cancers, reproductive dysfunction and cardiovascular disease, and complications relating to pregnancy and infant health.

Dr Gilbert's project will examine why the decline in smoking rates is slower among women than in the broader population, and what role gender, social class and cultural and sexual identity play in sustaining female smoking rates. Her study will employ qualitative research methods, such as in-depth interviews and cultural probes (using photography, diaries and social media), to gain insights into young women's experience of cigarette



smoking and understand what it means to them and what function it serves in their everyday lives.

Research shows young women today are generally well educated about tobacco facts but continue to smoke, unmoved by graphic campaigns. Research also shows young women see anti-smoking campaigns as ignoring the social context in which they smoke. The findings from this study will help to inform targeted interventions that take the anti-smoking message to a group of smokers who are not currently being reached. The project will benefit young women smokers and the next generation of children, as well as contributing to the nation's health and economic wellbeing.

Project Title: Young women's experiences of cigarette smoking: a qualitative examination of the intersection of gender, class, cultural and sexual identity

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