



# Confirming the Importance of Social Norms in Smoking Cessation Behavior

Jonathan T. Macy, PhD, MPH, Alireza Geshnizjani, MPH, & Susan E. Middlestadt, PhD  
 Department of Applied Health Science, School of Health, Physical Education, & Recreation, Indiana University

## BACKGROUND & OBJECTIVE

Smokers continually face the decision of whether to continue to smoke or to take measures to stop smoking. The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) suggests that intention to engage in such behaviors is determined by one's attitude toward the behavior, perceived norm about the behavior, and self-efficacy for engaging in the behavior. However, the relative importance of each determinant might vary with the specific behavior. In this study, we explored whether meaningful differences existed in the determinants of intention to continue to smoke versus intention to take measures to stop smoking.

## METHODS

This study included 395 adult smokers from seven Texas cities who were contacted by random digit dialing and interviewed by telephone. The smokers were surveyed about two behaviors – continuing to smoke and taking measures to stop smoking in the next month. Several 5-point Likert-style items were averaged to create measures of intention, attitude, perceived norm, and self-efficacy. We conducted two multiple regression analyses predicting intention from attitude toward the act, perceived norm, and self-efficacy for the two behaviors.

## RESULTS

Table 1 presents the standardized regression coefficients and the R<sup>2</sup> for the two outcome measures. For the behavior of continuing to smoke, attitude (Beta=.240, p<.001) and self-efficacy (Beta=.444, p<.001) significantly predicted intention (R<sup>2</sup>=.386). Perceived norm was not a significant predictor of intention to continue to smoke. For the behavior of taking measures to stop smoking, attitude (Beta=.340, p<.001), self-efficacy (Beta=.165, p<.001), and perceived norm (Beta=.341, p<.001) were all significant predictors of intention (R<sup>2</sup>=.365).

**TABLE 1 – Results of Multiple Regression Analyses Predicting Intention to Continue to Smoke and Intention to Take Measures to Stop Smoking Among Adults in Seven Texas Cities, 2007**

Outcome Variable	Intention to Continue to Smoke	Intention to Take Measures to Stop Smoking
Predictor	Standardized Regression Coefficient (β)	Standardized Regression Coefficient (β)
<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>.386</b>	<b>.365</b>
Attitude	.240***	.340***
Self-efficacy	.444***	.165***
Perceived norm	.034	.341***

\*\*\*p <.001

## CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The results from this study suggest that smokers' perceptions of what other think they should do (i.e., perceived norm) are important for taking steps toward cessation but do not influence their decision to keep smoking. This provides further evidence that delivering messages designed to encourage smokers to listen to their family, friends, and other people in their lives is likely to lead to quit attempts.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research was supported by National Cancer Institute Grant CA 098342. Thanks to Rachel Gross, Jesse Gelwicks, and Nate Stupiansky for their help with study design and instrument development.