



HOLD FOR RELEASE
June 11, 2001, 9:30am

Contact: Lorie Slass
202-879-6701

Favorable Imagery in Cigarette Advertising Overpowers Perceived Risks for Young People

New Book Details Effects of Cigarette Advertising on Young

Exposure to cigarette advertising leads young people to associate smoking with popularity and relaxation and these associations are stronger than any perceived risk from anti-smoking ads according to survey research included in a new book released today by the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania and the American Academy of Political and Social Science. Researchers found that anti-cigarette advertising prior to 2000 was not successful on a national basis in countering the favorable images of smoking cultivated by cigarette advertising.

New research in *Smoking: Risk, Perception and Policy*, released today in Washington, DC, found that adolescents and young adults (ages 14-29) are more likely to recall cigarette ads than those over 30. The favorable feelings elicited by images in smoking advertising make the behavior more attractive and more acceptable. Exposure to cigarette advertising is strongly related to images of popularity and relaxation, especially among the young. Adolescents exposed to cigarette advertising also report greater prevalence of smoking among their friends.

“As adolescents age, the sense of the riskiness of smoking declines and their positive feelings and images of smoking rise” said Dan Romer, Research Director of the Institute for Adolescent Risk Communication at the Annenberg Public Policy Center and a contributor to the book. “By creating favorable imagery, cigarette advertising lays the groundwork for smoking initiation in young people.”

The researchers found that perception of risk plays almost no role in deterring cigarette trial while exposure to cigarette advertising is positively related to taking up smoking. Much anti-smoking advertising has had little impact on preventing the initiation of smoking because it focuses on smoking risks without influencing the favorable images that motivate young people to begin smoking.

The tobacco industry has argued that those who choose to smoke know the risks. Yet Annenberg Researchers found that 14-22 year olds do not have a consistent and realistic sense of the addictive nature of smoking and they do not recognize how risky smoking is in relation to other hazardous behaviors.

-- MORE --

“The majority of smokers, regardless of age, want to quit smoking and believe they will do so within the next year,” said Paul Slovic, President of Decision Research in Eugene, Oregon, and Professor of Psychology at the University of Oregon. Slovic edited the volume and contributed a chapter to the book.

“When young people, and adults for that matter, start smoking,” added Slovic, “they do so based upon their feelings, not on any reasoned analysis of risks and benefits. As a result, they do not understand the consequences of their actions and they make decisions that they almost invariably come to regret.”

When asked, “If you had it to do over again, would you start smoking?”, more than 85% of adult smokers and about 80% of young smokers answered “no”. The more these current smokers felt addicted to cigarettes, the more often they had tried to quit, the longer they had been smoking, and the more cigarettes they were smoking per day, the more likely they were to say they would not start smoking again. These findings thus paint a portrait of smokers as individuals unable to control a behavior they have come to recognize as distasteful and harmful.

Smoking: Risk, Perception and Policy, published by Sage, is the first in a new series of books on public policy sponsored by the American Academy of Political and Social Science (AAPSS). Founded in 1889, the AAPSS seeks to promote the political and social sciences, in the comprehensive sense of those terms. It has sought to stimulate discussion through its public meetings, and to foster scientific research through its publications. The book includes analysis of two extensive surveys on the attitudes, beliefs, feelings, and perceptions of risk that young people associated with smoking. The surveys were conducted by telephone in 1999 and 2000 with over 4000 young people and adults. The book also explores the implications of the survey results on smoking-control policies. In addition to Romer and Slovic, contributors to the book include:

Jonathan Samet, Johns Hopkins University
Patrick Jamieson, University of Pennsylvania
Neil Weinstein, Rutgers University
George Loewenstein, Carnegie Mellon University
Neal Benowitz, University of California – San Francisco
R. Kirkland Ahern, University of Pennsylvania
Jon Hansen, Harvard Law School
Douglas Kysar, Cornell Law School
Richard Bonnie, University of Virginia Law School.

###

The Annenberg Public Policy Center was established by publisher and philanthropist Walter Annenberg in 1994 to create a community of scholars within the University of Pennsylvania that would examine the role of communications in public policy issues at the local, state and federal levels. The Center has four ongoing research foci: Information and Society; Media and the Developing Mind; Media and the Dialogue of Democracy; Health Communications. The Annenberg Public Policy Center supports research and sponsors lectures and conferences in these areas.