Contrary to what is believed by many, tobacco is the leading preventable cause of death in the United States, associated with one of every five deaths. Over the last several decades, an impressive body of health research has defined tobacco as a serious public health problem. The life span and quality of life of individuals throughout the country who use tobacco products - as well as non-smokers in environments of second hand smoke - have been substantially decreased (CDC, 1986, 1993). Results indicate that approximately nine of ten adults support restrictions on active smoking by youth. In addition to the physically harmful effects of tobacco, there are also social influences on adolescent tobacco use. Journal of Behavioral Medicine, 18, 315-330.

**ABSTRACT**

**INTRODUCTION**

Tobacco is the leading preventable cause of death in the United States, associated with one of every five deaths. Over the last several decades, an impressive body of health research has defined tobacco as a serious public health problem. The life span and quality of life of individuals throughout the country who use tobacco products - as well as non-smokers in environments of second hand smoke - have been substantially decreased (CDC, 1986, 1993). Results indicate that approximately nine of ten adults support restrictions on active smoking by youth. In addition to the physically harmful effects of tobacco, there are also social influences on adolescent tobacco use. Journal of Behavioral Medicine, 18, 315-330.

**METHOD**

The Social Climate Survey measures social and environmental indicators within an institutional framework. Specifically, the survey assesses normative beliefs, health knowledge, and practices/policies within each of the following social institutions: family and friendship groups; education; work-place; government and political order; health and medical care; recreation; leisure and sports; and mass culture and communication. Scientists at the SSRC developed many of the items included in the survey. Others were selected from existing measurement instruments with established validity. Specifically, the Social Climate Survey includes items from the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, the Current Population Survey - Tobacco Use Supplement, and California Adult Tobacco Surveys.

Data were collected for the 2001 Social Climate Survey of Tobacco Control via telephone interviews with a simple random sample of adults. The data were collected in July-September by the Survey Research Unit in the Social Science Research Center at Mississippi State University. Households were selected using random digit dialing procedures. (This includes households with unlisted numbers.) Within a household the adult to be interviewed was selected by asking to speak with the person in the household who is 18 years of age or older, and who will have the next birthday.

**RESULTS & DISCUSSION**

Of the households contacted, 3,002 completed the interview and 564 refused to participate (18.5%). Approximately nine out of ten adults believed that 1) that parents should not allow children under 18 to smoke (90.5%), 2) students should not be allowed to smoke in schools (89.6%), 3) stores that sell tobacco to minors should be penalized (94.0%), and 4) that smoke from a parent’s cigarette harms their children (95.2%). Support was weaker for restrictions on pro-tobacco social influences; 43.5% of adults believed that it is acceptable for parents to encourage kids to smoke, only about half supported restrictions on advertisements in magazines (42.1%), grocery and convenience stores (46.6%), and sporting events (55.6%).

These results reveal a paradox in the belief patterns of many adults. Despite substantial agreement among adults on tobacco control issues that restrict youth access to tobacco, many adults are reluctant to support policies that would restrict pro-tobacco social influences, as well as reduce youth exposure to ETS in the home and in public places.

**REFERENCES**


**Normative Beliefs and Knowledge about Youth and Tobacco**

Results indicate that approximately nine of ten adults support restrictions on active smoking by youth, while more than eight of ten adults recognize social influences on youth tobacco use.

**Support for Clean Air Policies and Exposure to ETS**

Although almost all adults believe that youth should not actively smoke, there is substantially less support for clean air policies that would protect youth from passive smoking.

**Support for Restrictions on Marketing and Social Models**

Although more than 80% of U.S. adults recognize that tobacco marketing targets youth and that youth are susceptible to adult smoking models, substantially fewer adults support restrictions on these social influences.