

Review Article

Pairing Peer Education and Social Media for Adolescent Smokers with Disabilities

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Tobacco usage among adolescents with and without disabilities is associated with negative outcomes in health and finance. To combat usage, inclusive peer education combined with social media outreach may benefit efforts to minimize, prevent, and discontinue tobacco use in adolescents with and without disabilities.

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Smoking has been linked to several negative outcomes (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2012). Nicotine, found in tobacco, has powerful and lasting effects on the developing brain, and adolescent exposure is associated with impaired cognition, attention, memory, and mood (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services). Particularly for individuals with disabilities, tobacco use may exacerbate impeding behaviors and characteristics (Beck Wells, 2023). The intricate relationship between social, economic, and health factors associated with disability poses risks for substance use, unhealthy habits, and addiction (Reif et al., 2023). In addressing the negative impact of smoking on adolescents, researchers have explored intervention strategies. A systematic review by Dodd et al. (2022) suggests that peer-education interventions show evidence of effectiveness. Additionally, Lazard (2021) found promise in social media campaigns educating about the harms of e-cigarette usage.

Peer Education for Tobacco Use

Peer mentors, individuals of the same age, can provide support towards a common goal. In Turkey, Bilgiç and Günay (2014) discuss the potential positive impact of systematically planned peer education in changing the smoking behaviors of adolescents. Khambayat et al. (2023) emphasize the effectiveness of peer-led programs in India, including peer-to-peer education and support, in preventing e-cigarette use. Peer educators, trained to understand and communicate the dangers of e-cigarettes, offer non-judgmental support to their peers. In Finland, Kiuru et al. (2010) suggest that addressing smoking trends in adolescents involves not only promoting resistance to peer pressure but also focusing on peer selection and challenging the perception that smoking is favorable.

In the United States, Glover-Kudon et al. (2019) found that raising the minimum legal age for tobacco sales to twenty-one, based on peer, family, or cultural groups, may accelerate a decline in tobacco prevalence. Lakon et al. (2015) and Mamudu et al. (2022) reported similar findings on the influence of peers on smoking behavior, indicating the potential impact on electronic nicotine delivery systems use.

Adolescents with Disabilities and Tobacco Use

Among adolescents with disabilities, Senders and Horner-Johnson found higher rates of cigarette use, e-cigarette use, and dual use. Krahn et al. (2015) reported differences in health outcomes for individuals with disabilities, highlighting higher rates of unmet healthcare needs, unhealthy lifestyle behaviors, mental health and chronic diseases, and social determinants of poor health. Chen et al. (2022) emphasized the importance of peer engagement, noting its influence on social outcomes for autistic adolescents.

Beck Wells (2023) suggests that evidence-based peer education programs may benefit adolescents with disabilities by reducing tobacco use and promoting positive decision-making, self-determination, and independent living skills. Wagemaker et al. (2022) highlight the potential for peers to promote prosocial behavior in inclusive settings.

Social Media and Peer Education

Combining peer education with social media may be a beneficial pathway to support smoking cessation and avoidance in adolescents, including those with disabilities. Elmore et al. (2017) found that media-

related cognitions significantly influenced adolescents' perceptions of social approval for alcohol and tobacco use.

In the context of social media, Argen et al. (2023) reported a preference for peer support among young people with learning disabilities. Lazard (2021) suggested that social media campaigns can effectively reach youth, potentially through peer-to-peer sharing. Lyu et al. (2022) recommended a combined approach, involving social media-based peer mentoring interventions for e-cigarette cessation.

Conclusion

Tobacco usage in adolescents, with and without disabilities, is associated with negative outcomes. Inclusive peer education combined with social media outreach may be effective in minimizing, preventing, and discontinuing tobacco use in adolescents with disabilities. The creation of such a program should be considered, with further investigation into the usefulness of peer education and social media programs, building on the insights from Lyu et al.'s (2022) research.

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Statements and Declarations

Data Availability and Sharing Statement

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Conflict of Interest Statement/Competing Interests

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Informed Consent

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Declarations

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