

# Media Release

## HOLLYWOOD MAKES SMOKING ACCEPTABLE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Research shows that Hollywood's depiction of smoking behaviour serves to reinforce the idea that smoking is acceptable for young people.

The study, *'Women and Smoking in Hollywood Movies: A Content Analysis'* conducted by Ichiro Kawachi, Gina Escamilla, and Angi Cradock is published in the latest edition of the *American Journal of Public Health*.

Conclusions were drawn from an analysis of 50 Hollywood films starring 10 popular female actors, totaling 96 hours of viewing.

"When we broke the films down into 5 minute intervals, 28.4% depicted smoking behaviour. What we found is that movies aimed at the younger viewing audiences, were less likely to carry negative messages associated with smoking use."

It was found that prevalence of smoking by lead and supporting actors was higher than the actual national prevalence for both females and males aged 18 to 44.

"Given that young people overestimate smoking prevalence among other young people and adults, they are more likely to become smokers themselves."

"It is important to consider that social learning theory states that people learn by paying attention to behaviours of people they aspire to. This includes looking at the qualities, skills and behaviours one hopes to achieve."

"For many, the allure of Hollywood is strong. Young people do not always distinguish that an actor is playing a role. Smoking is part of the character they are portraying, just as the clothing worn in the movie and other character traits of the role."

According to Kawachi, this certainly raises concerns about the effects of exposing young people to smoking in popular movies.

"These popular and high profile actresses serve as positive role models for today's young people. Many young women fashion their behaviour on these popular Hollywood stars and the characters they portray."

"The results of this and other related studies certainly should be taken into consideration in developing policies for the entertainment industry. Perhaps a voluntary code of ethics for this industry is something to think about to help address how smoking is depicted to young people through this influential medium."

Associate Professor Ichiro Kawachi, Director of the Harvard Centre for Society and Health, Harvard School of Public Health is in Melbourne to present a seminar, *'Investing in Social Capital as a population health improvement strategy'* hosted by VicHealth, Deakin University and NCEPH. VicHealth welcomes Associate Professor Kawachi who is one of the world's leading social epidemiologists. His particular interests are social capital, and social inequalities and health.

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