

Clegg Smith, K., Wakefield, M. A., Terry-McElrath, Y. M., Chaloupka, F. J., Flay, B., Johnston, L. D., et al. (2008). Relation between newspaper coverage of tobacco issues and smoking attitudes and behavior among American teens. *Tobacco Control, 17*, 17–24.

# Abstract

**Objective.** Geographic variation in youth smoking prevalence suggests that community-level factors influence risk of tobacco use. We examine the extent to which newspaper coverage of tobacco issues is related to youth smoking attitudes and behaviours.

**Design.** We conducted a content analysis of 8390 newspaper articles on tobacco issues from 386 daily newspapers circulating at 5% or more in 2001–3 Monitoring the Future (MTF) survey communities. This resulted in the creation of community level measures of news volume, content and valence. Associations between news and youth outcomes were assessed using logistic regression analyses adjusting for individual, geographic and tobacco policy factors linked to youth smoking and attitudes.

**Subjects.** 98 747 youth participating in the nationally representative school-based MTF annual surveys between 2001 and 2003.

**Main outcome measures.** Perceived harm of smoking, perceived peer smoking, disapproval of smoking, smoking within the past 30 days, daily cigarette consumption.

**Results.** In the five months preceding survey administration, newspapers in MTF communities published an average of 11.9 tobacco related articles (range 0–55.7). Each 10-article increase in newspaper volume over the five-month period was associated with increased odds of perceiving great harm from smoking (OR=1.04, p,0.01) and disapproving of smoking (OR=1.04, p,0.05) and decreased odds of perceiving most or all friends smoke (0.94, p,0.01) and smoking in the past 30 days (OR=0.93, p,0.001). No consistent association was found between the content or valence of coverage and youth smoking outcomes.

**Conclusions.** Gaining and keeping tobacco on the media agenda is an important tool for tackling youth smoking. As volume appears to be the driving factor, media advocacy may be best targeted towards generating events and highlighting issues likely to increase and sustain news attention.