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Watching movies increases tobacco consumption in men as well as women by up to 55%. But reading more newspapers has a protective effect and lowers tobacco consumption.

These findings are of an analysis of a study done by the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) and published in an international journal, PloS ONE, early this month.

The analysis was done by the Healis-Sekhsaria Institute of Public Health on the data of the NFHS survey on 1,23,768 women and 74,068 men across India. “Our analysis clearly showed an increase in tobacco consumption in men and women who were regular movie goers,” said Dr PC Gupta, director of the institute.

The research stated that monthly cinema attendance is associated with increased smoking among women and men and increased tobacco chewing among men. “One movie in a month is enough to increase the tobacco consumption percentage to a certain level,” said Gupta, adding it is so because actors and celebrities have a huge effect on the masses. Daily television and radio use was associated with higher likelihood of tobacco chewing among men and women. Interestingly, daily newspaper reading was found to be one of the most important link to lower likelihood of tobacco chewing among women.

Exposure to newspaper coverage of tobacco issues has links to reduced smoking rate and higher level of disapproval of smoking behaviour. Thus, the analysis states that the mass media has a two way effect — one which promotes the habit, and the other which acts like as a deterrent.

India is said to be the second largest tobacco consumer in the world and is expected to claim 1.5 million lives annually by 2020. “Such data will help in creating awareness of the tobacco problem in the country,” said Gupta.