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Watching films increases risk of tobacco use

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If you watch one or more movies in a cinema every month, you could be at a higher risk of being a tobacco user than somebody who doesn't, claimed non-governmental organisations. The Healis-Sekhsaria Institute of Public Health, Navi Mumbai, and the Harvard School of Public Health analysed the findings of the National Family Health Survey 2005-2006 to assess the association between media exposure and tobacco use. The analysts found that people who watch movies in cinemas once a month or more have a 17-55 per cent higher risk of being tobacco users than people who don't.

The findings were published in the June edition of Plos One, a free, online journal of peer-reviewed medical and scientific research that's available to all.

Monthly cinema attendance was associated with increased smoking among women and increased tobacco chewing among men. The organisations said this could be because the advertising and entertainment media are more likely to be open to pro-tobacco content, given the heavy promotion of tobacco use in advertising and incidence of smoking in movies. "People are influenced by what they see on the big screen," said Dr Prakash Gupta, director, Healis-Sekhsaria Institute of Public Health.

Daily television and radio use was also associated with a higher likelihood of tobacco chewing among men and women, while daily newspaper was related to lower likelihood of tobacco chewing among women, the report said.

"Actors and celebrities are admired by the common man. They are role models for today's youth. They could use their influence over the masses in a better way to talk about the ill effects of tobacco consumption," said Padmini Somani, director, Salaam Bombay Foundation.