



Promoting Smoking in Iranian Movies: The Need for Cultural Strategies and Legal Reforms to Reduce Tobacco Consumption

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Dear Editor,

Tobacco use remains the leading cause of preventable death worldwide. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), tobacco use killed 7.7 million people worldwide in 2020. The economic costs of tobacco use amount to billions of dollars. In Iran, tobacco use is the fifth leading risk factor for non-communicable diseases.¹ According to the statistics from the Ministry of Health, 43% of men and 25% of women smoke regularly.² In this context, the impact of media, especially movies, on adolescents' social and health behaviors is significant. Movies are a means of entertainment that play an essential role in shaping social values and norms, especially during adolescence when an individual's social identity is formed. During this sensitive period, movie actors can create attractive role models for young people whose behavior is expected to be imitated.³

Smoking in movies and television may give adolescents the false impression that smoking is common and accepted in society, which can consciously or unconsciously influence their behavior.⁴ Scientific evidence shows that adolescents who are exposed to smoking scenes in movies are more likely to experience tobacco themselves. The WHO consistently believes that there is a causal relationship between exposure to smoking scenes in movies and the experience of smoking during adolescence.⁵ These effects affect not only individual behavior but also social and cultural changes. In countries such as the United States, banning or at least restricting the display of smoking scenes in movies through adult ratings has been proposed as a strategy to reduce the negative impact of these shows on young people.⁶ However, this solution alone is insufficient and requires a more comprehensive approach. In Iran, the depiction of smoking in movies has

become a social and cultural problem, especially in home-screened movies that currently have a large audience. In this regard, statistics from the Ministry of Health show that the tendency to smoke at a young age in Iran is increasing sharply, and this issue could become a severe threat to the health of the country's future generation.⁷

To counter the adverse effects of depicting smoking in Iranian movies and reduce tobacco use among adolescents, a set of cultural, social, and legal measures must be implemented simultaneously. The first and most important solution is to impose legal and regulatory restrictions on the depiction of smoking in movies and TV series. Filmmakers and producers should be pressured to refrain from depicting smoking scenes in family movies. These measures should be implemented by establishing new laws and strengthening the supervision of media productions. In particular, movies made for teenagers and young adults should have specific ratings that prevent the depiction of smoking in them. Along with these restrictions, a strict and efficient monitoring system should be considered to monitor the content of movies on various platforms, including television, online networks, and home theaters. These monitoring measures can effectively prevent the depiction of smoking scenes in the media.

Another solution is increasing public awareness and changing smoking attitudes through media and educational campaigns. These campaigns can make adolescents and young people aware of the dangers of smoking by using attractive and informative content in the form of documentaries, social advertisements, and educational activities in schools and various media. For this purpose, using real stories of people who have experienced quitting smoking or have suffered from diseases caused by



smoking can have a good effect on changing attitudes. In addition, positive role models should be introduced in the media; for example, popular and famous personalities can participate in anti-smoking campaigns and spread strong messages about quitting and avoiding smoking.

The depiction of smoking in movies and series, especially in a society with a young and vulnerable population like Iran, is a severe challenge to public health. Tackling this phenomenon requires a combination of cultural, educational, and legal approaches. By imposing strict restrictions on the display of smoking scenes, implementing awareness campaigns, and promoting positive role models, the harmful effects of these images can be reduced. Taking these measures will not only help reduce tobacco use among adolescents and young people. Still, it will also be a practical step toward improving the health of the country's future generation.

Authors' Contribution

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