

PHOTOESSAY

Gains of stopping smoking: portraits of the dialogue between public health promotion, art and design

André S Szklo,^{1*} Evandro S F Coutinho,² Rejane Spitz³ and Nilton Gamba Jr³

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Tobacco is a major public health issue. It is estimated that the annual deaths attributable to smoking are approximately 5 million and will double in 2025.¹ Brazil has one of the highest smoking populations in the world (approximately 24 million adult smokers),² thus representing an important public health concern.

In 2008, we began a pragmatic intervention study aimed at promoting the use of a telephone counseling service for people wishing to stop smoking. The intervention used large (220 × 400 cm) posters placed at eye level on the central dividing columns of the boarding platforms of two subway stations in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. We were keen to show not only the adverse effects of continuing to smoke (Photo 1), but also the gains that can be achieved by quitting smoking (Photo 2). The study specifically aimed to assess whether the profile of individuals calling the quit line differed by the two stimuli displayed at subway stations, i.e. 'gains from quitting' or 'losses from continuing' to smoke. The posters focused on 'shortness of breath' as a key symptom of continuing to smoke because this is something individuals are aware of and a symptom that can change over a short-time frame.³ It is a symptom that affects younger and older smokers, as well as women and men, and would be potentially notable for subway users who have to ascent a lot of steps. The posters were designed with photos of real subway stairs in the background showing someone struggling to breathe on them or ascending without problems.

The posters attracted the attention of our potential target audience (Photos 3 and 4). The school children were hopefully too young to be smoking and requiring a quit line (Photo 5), but these images may have informed them about the adverse consequences of starting to smoke.

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¹ Epidemiology Unit, Prevention and Surveillance Section, Brazilian National Cancer Institute (INCA), Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

² Quantitative Methods Unit, National School of Public Health, Oswaldo Cruz Foundation (FIOCRUZ), Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

³ Arts & Design Unit, Catholic University, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

* Corresponding author. Epidemiology Unit, Prevention and Surveillance Section, Brazilian National Cancer Institute (INCA), Rua dos Invalidos 212/3 andar, 20231-020 Centro, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. E-mail: aszklo@inca.gov.br



Photo 1 Intervention focused on losses from continuing smoking. The wording on this negative-content poster is: main central theme 'To smoke is to lose breathing capacity'; in the steps, 'lose sleep, lose smelling good, lose energy, lose a nice smile, lose physical resistance, lose healthy breath, lose beautiful skin, lose money, lose ...'; on the floor, 'stop smoking, call 08005100015'



Photo 2 Intervention focused on gains from quitting smoking. The wording on this positive-content poster is: main central theme 'To stop smoking is to gain breathing capacity'; in the steps, 'gain sleep, gain smelling good, gain energy, gain a nice smile, gain physical resistance, gain healthy breath, gain beautiful skin, gain money, gain ...'; on the floor, 'stop smoking, call 08005100015'



Photo 3 Subway users observing gain-framed intervention. It is illegal to smoke on the subway in Brazil, and therefore none of the individuals we captured looking at the posters is actually smoking



Photo 4 Subway users waiting for the next train could easily see intervention displayed at 'eye level'. It is illegal to smoke on the subway in Brazil and therefore none of the individuals we captured looking at the posters is actually smoking



Photo 5 Interventions also communicated with young people. Here, scholars observing loss-framed intervention

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