



SMOKING, SOCIAL CLASS AND GENDER:

The Diffusion of the Tobacco Epidemic among Older Adults in Ireland

Keishia Taylor, Luke Clancy, TobaccoFree Research Institute.

1. Objectives

The diffusion model of the tobacco epidemic^{1,2} provides a framework to describe differences in smoking behaviour. The interrelation of gender and socioeconomic status (SES), mediated by age, is critical for understanding the diffusion of tobacco in high-income countries.

2. Methods

Secondary analysis of data collected in 2012 from 8504 Irish adults aged 50 and older (TILDA) was conducted. Due to missing data, an SES measure was constructed from education, occupation, medical insurance, income and car ownership using principal components analysis. The relationships between current and past smoking, age, gender and SES were examined using multinomial regression, controlling for social isolation. A simple slopes technique was used to visually represent the models and clarify interaction effects. This involved graphing the regression equation at specified ages and SES values (± 1 SD).

4. Discussion

The relationship between current smoking and SES changed over time, so that high SES older respondents and low SES younger respondents were more likely to smoke. This reflects the diffusion of smoking from the highest status “early adopters” to the lowest status at the later stages of the epidemic. In addition, higher SES respondents were more likely to quit.

Similarly, men more likely to currently smoke than women. But in line with the diffusion model of the tobacco epidemic³, more men than women quit smoking and the rates of smoking among women increased, reducing the gender gap among this cohort and anticipating the high rates of female smokers in younger generations.

5. Conclusions

This analysis confirms the spread of smoking from high SES men to low SES respondents and from men to women that has occurred during the lifetime of the respondents, illustrating the diffusion model of the tobacco epidemic among older Irish adults. Improved targeted cessation interventions for older adults may be of benefit to reduce inequalities in smoking.

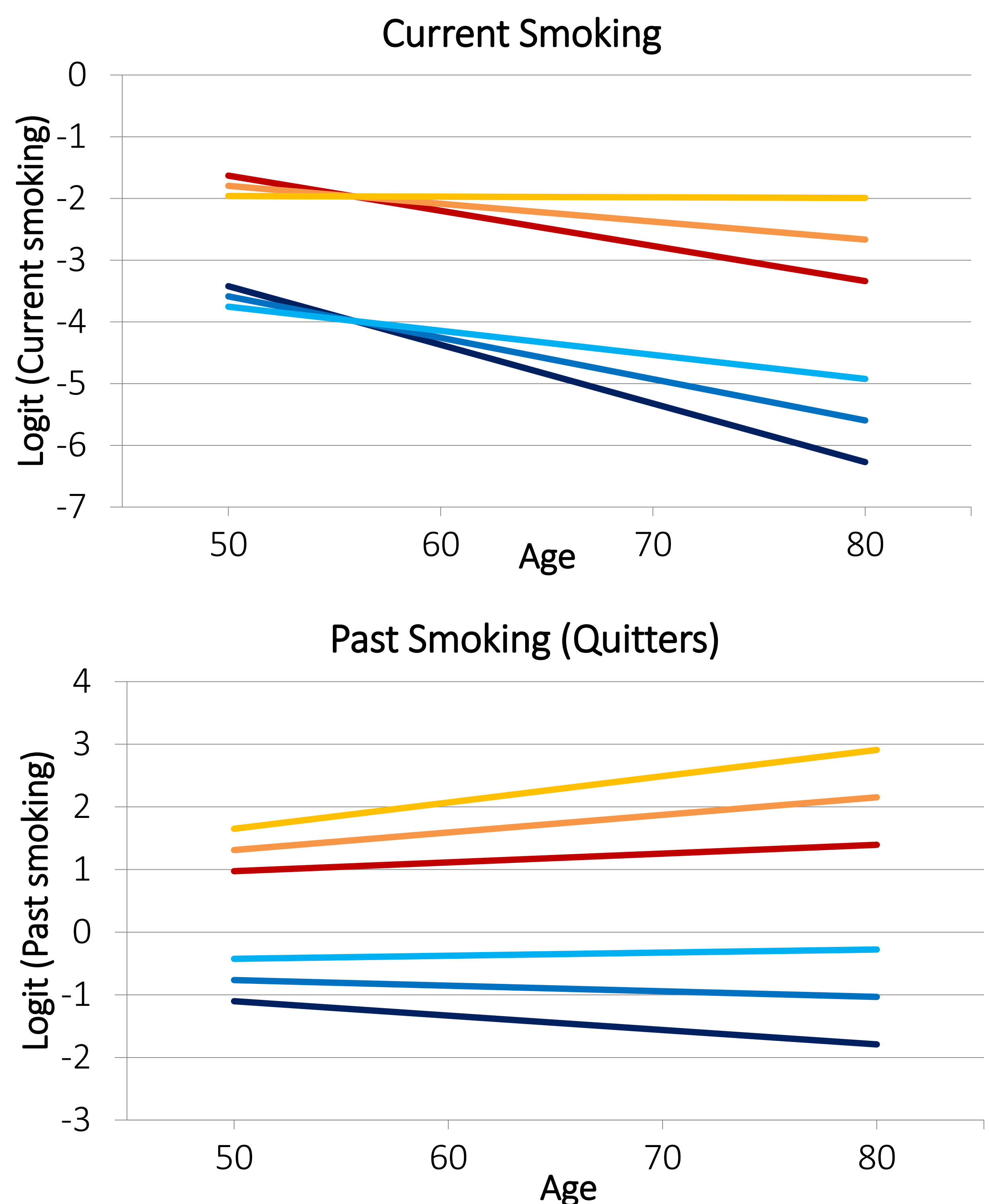
3. Results

Age, gender and SES were significantly related to current and past smoking behaviour and the interaction effects of age with SES and age with gender were also significant. These factors had a stronger effect on current smoking than on past smoking.

Men were much more likely to be current and past smokers than women among this cohort, but the gender gap was smaller among younger respondents.

High SES respondents were more likely to currently smoke than those with low SES, apart from those aged around 50, where respondents with lower SES were more likely to currently smoke. Those with high SES were more likely to have quit smoking in all age groups.

Simple Slopes: Effect of Age on Smoking by SES & Gender



For more information, please contact Keishia Taylor, keishia.f.taylor@gmail.com.

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References

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