

Article

# A Self-Reflection Program for Smoking Cessation in Adolescents: A Phenomenological Study

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**Abstract:** The study aimed to understand the experiences of adolescent smokers who participated in a smoking cessation program based on self-reflection, and to develop the theoretical basis for constructing similar programs. The participants, ten students from middle and high schools located in cities G and S, were interviewed after the program ended. Data were collected from August to November 2019 and analyzed using a phenomenological approach to understand participant experiences in depth. The analysis revealed five major themes: 'Uniqueness of the Program,' 'Perception of Smoking Cessation,' 'Positive Reflection on Life,' 'Understanding Others,' and 'A Search for Hope and Vision in Life.' The findings revealed that the smoking cessation program facilitated the development of self-identity and vision, which may indirectly strengthen the motivation for adolescent smokers to quit smoking. These findings suggest the need for a life-changing smoking cessation program that enhances self-concept and self-esteem. Moreover, it highlights the importance of follow-up research to ensure effectiveness, and the need to develop programs with creative content.

**Keywords:** Self-reflection, Adolescent, Smoking Cessation Program

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## 1. Introduction

The introduction should briefly place the study in a broad context and highlight why it is important. It should define the purpose of the work and its significance. The current state of the research field should be reviewed carefully and key publications cited. Please highlight controversial and diverging hypotheses when necessary. Finally, briefly mention the main aim of the work and highlight the principal conclusions. As far as possible, please keep the introduction comprehensible to scientists outside your particular field of research. References should be numbered in order of appearance and indicated by a numeral or numerals in square brackets, e.g., [1] or [2,3], or [4–6]. See the end of the document for further details on references. Adolescence is a transition period between childhood and adulthood that requires cognitive development, maturity, as well as adaptation to a variety of psychological and physical changes resulting from secondary sex characteristics [1].

One of the most challenging developmental tasks in adolescence is balancing dependence and independence within social relationships [2]. In fact, during adolescence, teenagers struggle to achieve independence from parents, and tend to socialize with peers of both genders, which affect the formation of their self-concept and self-esteem [1]. Further, adolescents tend to emulate colleagues and friends in establishing standards of self-control and behavior [3, 4].

According to the Korea Youth Risk Behavior Web-based Survey, the current smoking rate for middle and high school students is 6.7%, which shows a steady decrease since 2005, but has been stagnant since 2016 [5]. Similarly, the smoking rate of male students ranges from 6.3% to 6.7% since 2016 and that of females from 2.7% to 3.7%.

Smoking is known to have adverse effects on the body during adolescence, especially since the bodies are less developed than those of adults [6]. Further, smoking plays a role in the use of violence, sexual behavior, alcohol, and drugs as related to juvenile delinquency [7].

Previous studies report that use of tobacco in adolescence is closely related to daily stress levels, family functioning, and self-efficacy [8,9]. On the other hand, economic factors show a significant increase in the frequency of smoking as students' average monthly allowances increase [10].

To date, studies on factors related to youth smoking [4,11] and various programs, such as student counselling and health education to encourage smoking cessation and prevent secondhand smoke exposure, [12-15] have been developed. However, there is a lack of sequential intervention programs that aim to understand the factors related to teen tobacco use, provide in-depth and continuous management of teen smoking, and initiate a change in attitudes toward smoking by incorporating a meaningful vision into their lives. More importantly, it is time for continuous efforts to be developed and applied in the context of creative and practical programs.

Furthermore, it is necessary to develop a new program that enables young adults to envision themselves as future leaders of society, by fostering self-esteem, self-improvement, and positive thinking. The program content for adolescents is very crucial, since these adolescents are in a state of psychological transition, experiencing conflicts between self-consciousness and reality with many concerns about others' expectations and their future. Therefore, self-reflection, a process of discovering oneself, may facilitate identity formation, which is a crucial developmental task for teenagers. Moreover, teenagers form their egos through their relationships with others and by comparing themselves to others, which helps them understand themselves and enhances their ability to cooperate with others [16, 17].

Hence, in this study, the smoking cessation program focused on self-reflection and improvement. Experiences of adolescent smokers, who participated in a holistic program that aimed to encourage quitting tobacco use and reflecting on oneself, were analyzed using a phenomenological approach.

## **2. Materials and Methods**

### **2.1 Design**

This qualitative study adopted a phenomenological approach to gain a deeper understanding of the individual experiences of adolescent smokers who participated in the self-reflection and improvement program.

### **2.2 Participants**

Participants comprised of student smokers from P Middle School, P High School, and G High School located in G cities. Out of 10 students who voluntarily participated in this program, the study was centered on interviews with ten participants who continued to participate in two or three final interviews.

### **2.3 Preparation by the researcher**

The study was conducted after receiving approval from the institutional review board at Chung-Ang University (1041078-201910-HRSB-290-01). The researchers received training in conducting qualitative research by participating in seminars and academic conferences, and by publishing qualitative research studies in academic journals. Furthermore, researchers had regular meetings to analyze interview techniques and qualitative data.

## 2.4 Program design

The program was organized into four stages: 'Self-Reflection,' 'Self-Improvement,' 'Healing Concert,' and 'Vision Establishment Tour.' The program was structured in a way to help students not only identify, assess and analyze their own physical, social, and psychological problems through self-reflection, but also to understand themselves comprehensively and holistically in the context of living a healthy and happy life.

### 2.4.1. Stage 1: Self-Reflection

The first stage of the program was conducted in a quiet space in each school for three hours per session, once a week for a total of four weeks. Details of the 'Self-reflection' stage are given below in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Details of the Self-Reflection stage

Stage	Duration	Program content
Self-reflection	Once a week for a total of 4 weeks	Week 1 - A holistic and comprehensive understanding of oneself
		Week 2 - Finding oneself through silence
		Week 3 - Self-discovery with mentors and expert groups
		Week 4 - Self-reflection, changing one's mind
		- Establishing a positive perception of "personal boundaries" and expanding one's living space
		- Writing an autobiography (album and books)

### 2.4.2. Stage 2: Self-Improvement

Participants in this stage are students from the first stage, and included not only adolescent smokers, but also adolescents who are susceptible to smoking. This stage was designed to identify factors and establish strategies for self-improvement after reflecting on oneself in a holistic and integrated manner. The program was conducted over a period of 2 days and 1 night at a training facility located in G area. Details of the self-development stage are given below in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Details of the Self-Improvement stage

Stage	Duration	Program content
Self-improvement	Two days and one night	Expert seminar - Lecture on the meaning of life for adolescents - Strategies for self-improvement

	With mentors	- Self-discovery with mentors and expert groups
	With group members	- Self-exploration, self-reflection and changing one's mind

#### 2.4.3. Stage 3: Healing Concert

The healing concert aimed to provide teen smokers an opportunity to experience a sense of accomplishment through choir and dance performances. Further, a choir, consisting of university student mentors, and dance and vocal ensemble groups, composed of middle and high school students, also performed. The concert was designed to help participants develop social skills, self-confidence, and coping skills, to not only improve their ability to overcome all potential difficulties in their future, but also to find the driving force for happiness in their lives. The concert took place in a hall located in city G and went on for approximately 2 hours. Details of the healing concert are given below in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Details of the Healing Concert

Stage	Program content
Healing Concert	- Developing one's potential and enhancing the abilities of vulnerable students through choir activities
	- Self-development
	- Interaction with friends through music and Maintenance of social relationships
	- Achieving healing and confidence through chorus singing
	- Collaborating with colleagues and building trust with instructors
	- Formation of self-esteem, and creating a sense of accomplishment as well as future challenges through participation in the concert

#### 2.4.4. Stage 4: Vision Establishment Tour

Participants comprised of students who had completed all prior stages. The tour aimed to give these participants dreams and hopes for their future roles in the world, to facilitate future-oriented thinking and to instill hope that can help them establish specific directions for the future by visiting historical sites, institutions, and universities (Table 4).

**Table 4.** Details of the Vision Establishment Tour

Stage	Duration	Program contents
Vision Establishment Tour	A one-day group tour (university and	- Setting a direction for the future through a vision tour
		- University campus tour to experience the actual learning environment

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government agency tour)	- College laboratory tour where one can have hands-on experience with a detailed selection of majors
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	- A tour of major institutions that addressed future- oriented life (the National Assembly, the National Museum and the National Library)
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## 2.5 Data Collection

Data was collected, from August to November 2019, using in-depth interviews with 10 students who participated in the four-stage program. The meeting with the participants was scheduled by the school authorities. Moreover, to make the participants feel at ease, the meetings were held in spaces familiar to them such as school classrooms. A total of two to three in-depth interviews were conducted. The interview questions were based on experiences before and after the program and changes in perception and thinking. Further, the interviews were conducted 3 months after the program ended to estimate the extent to which positive changes were maintained.

Each in-depth interview took 30 minutes to an hour. Interview content was recorded based on prior consent, and additional details were written down by the researchers. During the first interview, participants were asked to express their expectations from the program in an open manner, and the second and third interviews were held to confirm the details provided in the first interview or to gain additional data. The interviews were unstructured containing open-ended questions such as ‘what did you experience in this program?’, ‘what did you learn about yourself through this program?’, ‘what did you experience regarding your plans for smoking cessation and the future?’ In addition, researchers made individual phone calls to further collect data and clarify areas of ambiguity when analyzing interview information.

## 2.6 Data Analysis

The phenomenological method aims to extract meaning from first-person accounts of experience. This study incorporated the phenomenological data analysis method of Colaizzi [18]. To ensure a general understanding of the data, the audio transcript was first thoroughly studied. The transcript was then reviewed to identify significant statements and their meaning, which were then categorized into themes. The categories were compared with each other and with the original transcript, which were further examined in detail and retained, if valid. The categories were then grouped under overarching themes, which the researchers analyzed to formulate a structured view. Lastly, the researchers verified the findings with the participants to confirm that the results were consistent with their intended meanings.

## 3. Results

The analysis of the experience of adolescent smokers who participated in the self-reflective smoking cessation program is shown in Table 5. The analysis of the original data revealed 60 meaning units, out of which overlapping contents were merged into 26 formulated meanings. These were then

classified into 7 categories and 5 themes. The 5 themes (see Table 5) are ‘uniqueness of the program,’ ‘perception of smoking cessation,’ ‘positive reflection of life,’ ‘understanding others,’ and ‘a search for hope and vision in life.’

**Table 5.** Analysis of experiences of Smoking Cessation program

Theme	Category	Formulated meaning
Uniqueness of the program	Expectations arose from the differences with other programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Letting go of the idea that all smoking cessation programs are boring and unoriginal</li> <li>· Curiosity arose from the differences with other programs that promoted rote learning</li> <li>· Waiting to participate in the program and raising expectations from the program</li> <li>· Healing the mind with the help of mentors and colleagues</li> <li>· Opportunity to get intimate with diverse types of people</li> <li>· Expecting a program that can change one’s smoking habits</li> </ul>
	Finding the causes of their smoking behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Looking back on one’s youth and attitudes towards life</li> <li>· Becoming aware of the cause and reason for smoking</li> <li>· Thinking about others’ behavior and thoughts</li> </ul>
Perception of smoking cessation	Recognizing that it is unnecessary to smoke	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Feeling unnecessary and insensitive towards smoking</li> <li>· Recognizing the severity of smoking</li> </ul>
	Regret and reflect on one’s life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Recognizing the health risks of tobacco smoking</li> <li>· Feeling regret for having started smoking too early</li> <li>· Thinking of how one’s self-esteem is low</li> <li>· Feeling a lack of dreams and goals</li> <li>· Reflecting on negative attitudes</li> </ul>
Positive reflection of life	Understanding family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Recognizing that smoking also affects a family’s health</li> <li>· Becoming aware of parents’ feelings</li> <li>· Feeling sorry for parents</li> <li>· Acknowledging the importance of family</li> </ul>
	Understanding others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Knowing why friends smoke</li> <li>· Recognizing the similarities and differences between friends and oneself</li> <li>· Feeling that one should not ask a friend to smoke</li> </ul>
A search for hope and vision in life	Recognizing one’s strengths and committing to life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Recognizing that there are more worthy pursuits than smoking</li> <li>· Engaging the need to boost one’s self-esteem</li> </ul>

goals . Becoming curious about one's goal in life and the future

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### 3.1 Uniqueness of the Program

Participants felt that this particular smoking cessation program was different from other smoking cessation programs that they had attended as the other programs were boring, unoriginal, and lacked complex intervention. They also explained that their level of participation and expectations from the program increased as the program progressed. Positive effects arose by repeatedly meeting new mentors and participants, which allowed their minds to heal and to develop interest in things and pursuits other than just smoking.

*"I thought it would be boring and unoriginal again. I felt the kind mentors treated and respected me as an ordinary student. I felt close to them and it made me want to take program again. I thought it was getting better and better expecting of what to do next." (Participant H)*

*"it was good to have a chance to meet new friends and talk about different topics. We traveled together, rehearse at concerts, made a stage together and became close." (Participants A and J)*

*"My parents nagged me every day about quitting smoking. I wanted to take a shot as I thought it would be easier to meet new friends and do it as a group than to do it alone. It was a special program as I reflected on my thoughts and attitudes." (Participants B and D)*

### 3.2 Perception of Smoking Cessation

Participants revealed that they had received several educational lessons on the harmful effects of smoking since grade school, but they still had questions as to why they should quit smoking. Further, they did not take the negative effects of smoking seriously since they had not experience any of these effects directly. However, they explained that they discovered the reasons why they started smoking by reflecting on their youth and attitudes towards life. Additionally, they shared that they realized they behaved and thought differently as compared to others.

*"Self-reflection has allowed me to think about how I behaved and grew up as a child. After I entered middle school, I just started smoking with my friends without much thinking... I think that has become a habit. And I thought that people would think someone who smoke as a bad kid.... As a result, I drifted apart from good friends who also study well.. I think I just lived like this." (Participant C)*

*"My grandfather still smokes, and he's healthy. The last time I took part in non-smoking education, they just scared me with lung cancer and stuff.. There were no attempts to make me realize and understand by myself to quit smoking, so I started not liking such educational programs..." (Participant E)*

Moreover, over the course of the program, the participants realized that the need to smoke was unnecessary and they recognized the consequences of smoking.

*"I do not know exactly why I should quit smoking... but I did not have any health problems from smoking."*

*People just said that it is bad, but they did not acknowledge and respect me... The program didn't just educate me that smoking was bad, but it made me to face the consequences of smoking behavior to realize the seriousness of the problem. Also, teachers did not treat me like a bad kid. They respected me all throughout the program...."* (Participant I)

### 3.3 Positive reflection of life

Participants expressed remorse for their past behavior. Some of the participants regretted having started smoking so young and not being aware of the seriousness attached to smoking. Some of them even thought they were worthless and helpless, and felt sad about not having any dreams or goals.

*"Self-rationalization? Yes, it is. Until now I thought that smoking may be harmful but not painful. What can I do about it? Smoking is none of other's business, but now I realize I was wrong."* (Participant F)

*"I think I lacked confidence. I felt helpless and I compared myself with others, so I believe I started smoking to look confident. I should not have done that. But through the program I realized that there were many things that are worth giving a shot."* (Participant E)

*"I didn't have a dream. I didn't even know why I should have a dream....I believe that if I try hard enough, I can become anything – even a congressman."* (Participant C)

### 3.4 Understanding others

Participants shared that they felt apologetic and realized the value of their families as a result of the self-reflective smoking cessation program. They were previously not aware that smoking could affect their families' health since they were ignorant of the people around them. Additionally, they realized the importance of their family and themselves. Although they had not been aware of whether smoking could affect their families' health because they only cared about themselves and were not interested in the people around them, they began to experience the negative consequences of smoking as they reflected on their lives and became aware of their behavior during the program. Moreover, participants elucidated that they understood their parents' feelings and were genuinely apologetic for having smoked during adolescence. As such, they mentioned that they valued the experience of realizing how their actions affect their families as well as themselves.

*"I was nervous but proud of myself when we performed during Healing Concert what we practiced dancing and singing... Because the program was interesting, it was easier to get closer to each other. Our attention was diverted from smoking, so we forgot to smoke...."* (Participant A)

*"I think I only thought about myself. I think that's why I have been showing problem behaviors by smoking intentionally. But I think it could have been a burden to my mom and dad. My mom must have been very tired. It also smells, yet my mom doesn't even smoke..... I feel very sorry for my mom...."* (Participant A)

*"I really thought that I would get hit when my parents found out that I was smoking? But they were gentle with me. At that time, I just liked the fact that I was not being scolded, but now when I think about it, they were trying to be patient even if they were having difficult times with me. Even though they were very upset...."* (Participant E)



Participants also experienced changes in understanding their friends by wondering about the motives of their for smoking, and elucidating how they were similar and different to their friends. Moreover, the statement, *"I won't recommend a cigarette to a friend,"* suggests that they placed importance on the meaning of friendship.

*"Sometimes I feel like I don't want to do anything, and it is annoying when someone says something, but so did my friends." (Participant A)*

*"I now realized during the program that my thoughts can be different from other, and everything goes fine if we understand this." (Participant D)*

### 3.5 Searching for hope and vision in life

In addition to regretting their past, participants also formed expectations regarding their future. They thought there was no need to smoke after experiencing increased self-esteem. Although they did not come up with a definitive dream or plan for the future, they felt hopeful in having loose ideas. As such, most students became optimistic about being a new person with set of expectations and hopes for the future.

*"Although I do not have an absolute dream, Until now, school teachers kicked me out of the classroom, saying my actions were wrong. Anyways, getting to have a dream feels good, and I hope to be so." (Participant I)*

*"I started to think, "If my self-esteem increases, then I will not have to smoke any longer." Coming across chances, just like this program, to see others live happily, gave me hope, and college tours made me think, "Would I be able to go to that college if I study hard enough?" (Participant E)*

*"My mentor asked me to think deeply about what I can do best. Since I was younger, I loved sports and do well at it? So I decided to work harder and have sports as my specialty and become someone better." (Participant G)*

*"Quit smoking and become a new person! That is my goal now." (Participant B)*

## 4. Discussion

The study examined the experiences of teen smokers who participated in the smoking cessation program based on self-reflection.

Firstly, adolescent smokers explained that the self-reflection program, unlike other programs, had a unique and creative approach, which developed their interests and increased their expectations. Participants shared that other programs they had attended merely focused on the dangers of smoking, such as lung cancer, which only created fear among the participants. Further, participants developed a sense of intimacy and stability, which enhanced the ability to adapt. These findings are consistent with Flannery & Smith's study in which the effectiveness of education and positive emotions were increased when an environment creates intimacy and trust within social relationships [19]. These positive results have been shown to develop intrinsic motivation for participants to make their own decisions and to feel confident regarding their actions. Additionally, Kiemer, Gröschner, Kunter & Seidel reported that when students experience the teachers as autonomous and competence-

supportive, they were more likely to experience intrinsic learning motivation [20]. Therefore, it is essential to develop creative content that is specific for teenagers and designed to arouse curiosity, which can then increase participation and satisfaction of participants. Furthermore, it is crucial for the program hosts' attitude to demonstrate that everyone, especially vulnerable students, are worthy of respect.

Secondly, the participants had an opportunity to contemplate and be aware of their smoking behavior. Before attending the program they were vaguely aware of the problems of smoking, but never had a chance to associate it with their life. However, they could identify the causes of their smoking and related problems through the program by reflecting on their experiences and exchanging ideas with each other about tobacco use. It was also noted that the motives for smoking, as perceived by the participants, were often a friend's suggestion to smoke, low academic achievement, bullying, a sense of alienation, stress in everyday life, or an urge for novel experiences, among others. This parallels with research suggesting that most teenagers are more likely to smoke when there is negative influence from others, interpersonal problems, uneasy mental health, and poor academic achievement [21].

Teen smokers lack the opportunity to explore themselves in-depth, reflect on their delinquent behaviors, and discover life values. For these adolescents, it is relevant not to take a one-sided approach to warn them about the consequences of smoking or the need to quit smoking, but to strengthen their strengths and positive thinking. This is supported by Adams and Oliver's (2019) findings which established that one's identity and socializing in groups allowed adolescents to recognize their problems and explore strategic ways to manage them [22].

Third, participants were able to reflect on their lives while participating in the program. Self-reflection is a process of exploring one's own experiences, which allows processing of meaning associated with different life experiences [16]. Meanwhile, one of the monumental developmental tasks that individuals face during adolescence is identity formation. Accordingly, teenagers continue to realize who they are and understand their tendencies. Some participants in this study also realized, through self-reflection, that they had been living without hopes and dreams, and with negative thoughts and low self-esteem.

David and Doebel posit that when an adolescent is self-conscious and has control over him/herself, he/she can establish changes in thinking and behavior, and pursue personal goals and responsibility, thereby predicting healthy adaptation [23].

Fourth, the participants felt apologetic toward their families and realized how precious their family was to them. Additionally, they became aware of the differences and similarities between themselves and their friends. Family and friends, who are the closest people in a teenager's daily life, have tremendous influence on them. Notably, some of the factors that contribute to smoking among adolescents are negative consequences in relationships within families, or pressure and recommendations from friends to smoke [24]. The participants' experiences of self-reflection seem to have broadened the way they understand others by allowing them to recognize how they are affecting the people around them and to develop harmonious relationships with colleagues [25].

Fifth, some participants were able to envision their future life through reflection, discover their strengths, and become aware of their potential. Such attention and reinforcement of abilities bolstered their self-efficacy. Further, confidence in themselves and in their ability to change their behavior may have motivated them to quit smoking. A study by Ayar et al. also explains that self-efficacy and

smoking are negatively correlated, which further supports the assumption of this study that an increase in self-efficacy motivates smokers to stop smoking [9].

## 5. Conclusions

This study was conducted using the phenomenological method in order to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of adolescents who completed a self-reflective smoking cessation program, and to provide a theoretical basis for the designing of future anti-smoking programs.

The five common themes experienced by the participants included 'uniqueness of the program,' 'perception of smoking cessation,' 'positive reflection of life,' 'understanding others,' and 'a search for hope and vision in life.' Such goals of the program were based on facilitating self-reflection throughout the four gradual phases of the program.

Through this program, adolescents gained a wider understanding of others through self-reflection, and found their happiness and vision in life. This experience indirectly shows that quitting smoking makes people feel positive about life and creates new perspectives. The researchers hope that the content discussed in this study could be used as fundamental data in the development of anti-smoking programs for adolescents in the future.

Recognizing the need for further systematic and practical research based on the results of this study, the researchers would suggest that additional specific studies be conducted to enable adolescents to realize the need to quit smoking through self-reflection.

**Author Contributions:** For research articles with several authors, a short paragraph specifying their individual contributions must be provided. The following statements should be used "Conceptualization, X.X. and Y.Y.; methodology, X.X.; software, X.X.; validation, X.X., Y.Y. and Z.Z.; formal analysis, X.X.; investigation, X.X.; resources, X.X.; data curation, X.X.; writing—original draft preparation, X.X.; writing—review and editing, X.X.; visualization, X.X.; supervision, X.X.; project administration, X.X.; funding acquisition, Y.Y. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.", please turn to the [CRediT taxonomy](#) for the term explanation. Authorship must be limited to those who have contributed substantially to the work reported.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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