



The Meaning of Smoking for Girls: A Qualitative Study Among Female High School Students in Madura, Indonesia

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Abstract

Introduction: In Indonesian society, smoking among women remains largely regarded as socially unacceptable. Nevertheless, an increasing number of young women continue to smoke, and the prevalence of this behavior is rising.

Methods: This phenomenological study employed in-depth interviews to explore the meanings and experiences associated with smoking among adolescent females. The study involved 11 young women who began smoking during junior high and high school (mean age=16 years). An in-depth interview guide was developed based on relevant literature and subsequently reviewed and validated by public health experts.

Results: The findings revealed that the participants often perceived cigarettes as their “closest friends,” offering relief from emotional burdens and mental distress. Factors such as curiosity, peer influence, parental smoking, family conflicts, and romantic relationship problems were identified as primary initiators of smoking behavior. Smoking was viewed as a self-determined practice shaped by the individual’s personal interpretation. Furthermore, societal stigma toward female smokers played a significant role in constructing the meaning and self-perception of adolescent female smokers. For these participants, smoking symbolized both loyalty and a means of achieving autonomy and happiness.

Conclusion: Given that women are at greater health risk from smoking compared to men, prevention programs should be designed to address adolescents’ perceptions and attitudes toward smoking in relation to both health and social dimensions. Incorporating these perspectives can strengthen the effectiveness of health interventions targeting female adolescents.

Keywords: Adolescent smoking, Female health, Qualitative research, Smoking prevention, Social issues

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Introduction

Smoking remains a major public health challenge, with Indonesia reporting the highest prevalence of tobacco use among ASEAN nations. In 2016 alone, more than 560,000 tobacco-related deaths were recorded across low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) in the region, and smoking was responsible for approximately 25% of all global cancer deaths (1–3). Previous studies in Indonesia have demonstrated that smoking is more prevalent among men than women; however, the number of female smokers has continued to increase annually. According to the 2018 RISKESDAS survey, 47% of Indonesian men and 1% of women aged 10 years and older reported daily smoking (4), indicating that approximately 35% of the national population engages in tobacco use (5). Alarming, the prevalence of smoking among women, particularly adolescents, has shown a steady upward trend

in recent years.

Adolescent smoking represents an escalating concern. The World Health Organization (WHO) reported that the global prevalence of smoking among individuals aged 10–19 years increased from 7.2% in 2013 to 9.1% in 2018. In Indonesia, the tobacco industry has increasingly targeted young women by employing marketing strategies that emphasize ideals of independence, beauty, and financial success. These efforts have been reinforced through the introduction of gender-specific products such as slim cigarettes, alongside aggressive social media campaigns. The gradual erosion of traditional social taboos surrounding female smoking has further contributed to the normalization of this behavior (5).

In several regions, including Indonesia, the tobacco industry’s marketing has deliberately expanded its focus to include young women in addition to men. Although



the proportion of female smokers remains lower than that of males, it continues to rise steadily. Globally, men are approximately four times more likely to smoke than women (48% vs. 12%) (6). While the global prevalence of smoking among men has plateaued and is projected to decline modestly, the proportion of female smokers is expected to continue increasing over time.

Globally, female adolescents are increasingly smoking at rates approaching those of their male peers, with projections indicating a significant rise in female smokers by 2025. This trend presents substantial health risks, as smoking among women has been associated with cervical cancer, osteoporosis, preterm birth, and an elevated risk of cardiovascular disease. In Indonesia, female smokers also contend with social stigma, as cultural norms frequently portray women who smoke as “bad” or “immoral.” Nevertheless, smoking among women persists, often motivated by personal factors such as stress relief, the pursuit of autonomy, or social pressures (7–10).

Multiple factors contribute to the rising prevalence of female smokers, particularly in developing countries (11). Among these is the growing purchasing power of female adolescents and young women, which increases access to cigarettes (12). Concurrently, longstanding social and cultural restrictions that historically limited female smoking are gradually diminishing, enhancing the social acceptability of smoking among women; in some contexts, female smoking is increasingly perceived as normative. Observations from countries such as the United States suggest that women’s expanding autonomy and evolving social roles have contributed to increased smoking prevalence, a pattern likely to manifest in developing countries as well (13).

Although female adolescents who smoke are generally aware of the health risks associated with tobacco use, including potential negative social judgments, the underlying reasons for continued smoking warrant closer investigation. Adolescents are often influenced more by emotional factors than by rational considerations, with smoking serving as a coping mechanism or a form of self-expression. According to the Behavioral Meaning Theory, individuals engage in behaviors such as smoking based on intrinsic motivations and emotional drivers, underscoring the importance of understanding the personal and cultural meanings attributed to smoking.

Adolescent behavior is primarily driven by personal and intrinsic meanings. The decision to engage in a particular behavior often depends on how it provides enjoyment, personal benefit, or relief from tension, anger, or frustration, regardless of the individual’s awareness of its potential harm (14,15). Women face greater health risks than men from smoking, and culturally, female smokers are often subject to negative societal perceptions. Nonetheless, smoking remains a personal choice, with women engaging in the behavior for diverse reasons. This study builds on previous research to investigate the meanings and experiences associated with smoking among teenage girls who are students, focusing on why

they continue to smoke despite the strong social stigma against female smoking in regions such as Sampang, Madura. Whether smoking is perceived as positive or negative, healthy or harmful, each smoker possesses unique motivations, perspectives, and interpretations that merit careful consideration, particularly among female adolescents.

The primary aim of this study is to explore the perspectives of teenage girls who smoke in Sampang, Madura, a context in which female smoking is heavily stigmatized. By examining both personal motivations and the social implications of their smoking behavior, this study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the complex factors that sustain smoking among female adolescents in such environments.

Methods

Study Design and Participants

This study employed a phenomenological approach, utilizing in-depth interviews to explore the meanings attributed to smoking among adolescents. An in-depth interview method was selected as it is a widely recognized qualitative approach that facilitates a comprehensive understanding of individual experiences and perspectives regarding a specific issue (16).

The schools included in this study are located in the Sampang district on Madura Island and are classified as suburban. They enroll students from various regions within the Sampang district. According to 2019 statistical data, Sampang Sub-district, the capital of Sampang Regency, has one of the highest numbers of junior and senior high school students and the greatest concentration of educational facilities, both public and private, within the regency (17). Consistent with the broader demographic of Madura, the majority of the population in Sampang District identifies as Muslim. Participants were selected purposively according to the following inclusion criteria: female adolescents; junior or senior high school students in the Sampang District aged 11 to 19 years; and current cigarette smokers. Young women who had smoked more than one cigarette and/or had been smoking for more than one year were considered active smokers. Both conventional and electronic cigarettes were included. All participants provided informed consent to participate in the study. Before data collection, the researchers obtained permission from the school administration to approach the students. The students were then fully informed about the purpose of the study and the research procedures. Moreover, the researchers contacted participants and their parents or guardians by phone to provide further information and secure consent before commencing data collection.

For participants under the age of 18, written consent to participate in the study was obtained from their parents or legal guardians. The consent forms were distributed to parents through the school administration. A total of 11 students met the inclusion criteria and were eligible to participate in the study. All communications with

the participants and their parents were facilitated and managed by the school authorities.

Data Collection and Procedures

This study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic in mid-2021; consequently, data were collected using both online and offline methods. Online data collection was conducted via phone and video conferencing, while offline data collection was performed face-to-face in accordance with prevailing health regulations. At the time of the study, Sampang Regency was classified as a yellow zone, and schools implemented a hybrid teaching model (combining online and offline instruction). Therefore, permission to access schools and meet participants in person was granted.

Data were gathered using in-depth interviews with the selected research participants. This method allows researchers to explore the subjective meanings attributed to the phenomenon under investigation and to gain a comprehensive understanding of participants' lived experiences.

To establish trust with participants, researchers engaged with them before conducting interviews through telephone and informal meetings with both the students and their parents or guardians. The research objectives and procedures were clearly explained, and participants were assured that their personal identities would remain confidential from the public, other students, and school staff. Teachers and parents were not involved in the data collection process, allowing participants to express their thoughts and opinions freely. Given the in-depth nature of the interviews, participants were informed that they could ask questions or provide additional comments at any time. Researchers emphasized that candid responses and perspectives were valued and essential to the study.

Data were collected from seven schools in March 2022. Interviews were conducted in school rooms or public spaces that had been mutually agreed upon by the researchers and participants. Each interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. In-depth interviews with each participant were conducted at least three times to ensure data saturation, consistent with prior studies employing in-depth interviews as a qualitative data collection method. The primary investigator conducted all interviews. The discussion guide was developed based on existing literature and refined through group sessions with multiple qualitative research experts before the interviews. The interview process was implemented using methods validated by these experts. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim by two research assistants, each holding a master's degree and possessing experience in conducting in-depth qualitative interviews. To obtain comprehensive insights into adolescents' perspectives, attitudes, feelings, and meanings regarding smoking, the interview procedure was carefully structured. The interviews began with questions about the initiation of smoking. Subsequent questions addressed daily cigarette consumption and the types of cigarettes used.

Participants were then asked to reflect on their smoking habits through questions such as: "How do you perceive young women who smoke?" and "What does smoking signify to you?"

Data Analysis

All interview data were compiled and transcribed verbatim to serve as the unit of analysis. To ensure a comprehensive understanding, the transcripts were reviewed multiple times by the researchers and two qualitative research specialists. Data were subsequently segmented into meaning units, which were assigned initial codes. These codes were compared iteratively based on their similarities and differences and subsequently organized into categories and overarching themes. The coded data and themes were then translated into English. To ensure semantic equivalence and translation accuracy, a back-translation process was conducted with the assistance of professional linguists, thereby maintaining fidelity to the original Indonesian text.

Results

Participant Characteristics

A total of 11 students participated in this study, including six high school students and five junior high school students. The duration of smoking among participants ranged from six months to four years. Both conventional cigarettes and electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes) were used. All participants (100%) reported having tried e-cigarettes (vape); however, none owned their own devices due to cost, and they only used e-cigarettes when offered by friends. Overall, participants expressed a preference for conventional cigarettes.

Participants smoked a minimum of one cigarette per day and a maximum of six cigarettes per day. All reported that their fathers were smokers. Daily expenditure on cigarettes ranged from an average of Rp3,000.00 (\$0.90) to a maximum of Rp25,000.00 (\$1.60). Six participants attended Islamic-based schools: MTs (Madrasah Tsanawiyah), equivalent to junior high school, and MAN (Madrasah Aliyah Negeri), equivalent to high school, both under the supervision of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia.

Data were analyzed using direct content analysis, with coding guided by the research questions. Interview data were classified into four main themes and sixteen categories. A summary of the generated themes and categories is presented in [Table 1](#).

Smoking behavior was interpreted in diverse ways by the participants in this study. Many participants perceived their smoking positively, viewing it as an adaptive strategy to cope with challenges and stressors. They described smoking as a means of relieving stress, attaining a sense of freedom, having a constant companion, expressing disappointment, diverting conflict, and experiencing personal pleasure.

Initially, participants believed that smoking was inappropriate for women. However, peer influence

Table 1. Research analysis of the meaning of smoking in junior high school and high school girls

Theme	Category	Coding	Quotation
The beginning of a smoking habit	Age of starting to smoke	11 years old 13 years old 15 years old 17 years old	"I started smoking when I was in 7 th grade" (KH, 18yo) "I was in 5 th grade when I started smoking, but then I stopped. I began to smoke again in 8 th grade...." (DS, 18yo) "I started smoking when I entered high school" (FJ, 15yo)
	How they were introduced to smoking	Tried to emulate some friends Got invited by friends Influence from parents The cigarettes were available Having familial issues Break up with their lover Out of curiosity	" I was invited by a friend (to smoke) after school..." (AY, 13yo) "It was free time during classes, a friend brought an electric cigarette, then I tried it..." (SM, 14yo) "There are always cigarettes available at home, it was my father's, but I got curious and tried it..." (ST, 15yo) "...Stressed because my parents are never at home"(MR, 16yo) "...I smoke because my boyfriend left me when I was so in love with him, I was brokenhearted" (MS, 17 yo) "... The taste made me curious since everyone is smoking..." (DN, 16yo"
	Cigarette type	Conventional cigarette Electric cigarette (vape)	".. yes, cigarettes...." (AL, 15yo) "...my favorite is <i>Surya</i> cigarettes, they taste incredible..." (DS, 18 th) "... I have tried Vape, but I don't own it since it costs so much. If I want to taste it, I'll just ask my friend who owns it." (UL, 15yo)
Smoking behavior process	How many cigarettes are smoked (each day)	1 to 8 cigarettes Depends on the mood If there are any (free) cigarettes	"At least one cigarette a day, if I'm lucky, I can smoke six a day ..." (MS, 17yo) "I smoke when there's one available. I usually take my father's cigarette...."(AY, 13 yo) "...I smoke with my older cousin, and it's not every day...just when we are in the mood" (SM, 14yo)
	Reasons to keep smoking	1. Social smoker 2. Many of their friends smoke 3. Lonely 4. Smoking when they have the money to buy one 5. Allowed by their boyfriend/girlfriend 6. Unnoticed by parents	" When I hang out with my friends after school, then we smoke in our usual place, sometimes we buy it together, or if there are any friend who brings one pack, we can share it" (FJ, 17yo) "...When I have the money, I buy one. Only with Rp3,000 I got 2 cigs" (ST, 15yo) "...My boyfriend knows I smoke, sometimes we do it together" (MS, 17yo) "... My parents didn't know...." (DN, 16yo)
	Smoking taste	1. Bitter but tasty 2. Nice 3. Sweet and sour	" (conventional) cigarettes are bitter, but they're tasty and made me addicted" (AL, 15yo) "...Vape tastes sweeter than conventional cigarettes, and it also produces more smoke (than the conventional one)..." (MR, 16yo) "...cigarettes taste amazing..." (KH, 18yo)
	Smoking time	1. Evening 2. Hanging out with friends 3. Alone at home 4. When cigarettes are lying at home 5. Whenever there is an urge to smoke 6. Whenever there is money to buy cigarettes 7. Whenever someone invites	"At nights when all my family is asleep, I will smoke in my own room..." (AY, 13 yo) "I smoke when I'm home alone and I will smoke in my own room... I feel free..." (UL, 15yo) "When I hang out with some friends, they usually bring some (cigarettes)...." (MS, 17yo) "When I'm in the mood I must smoke..." (DS, 18yo) "When I have the money, I immediately buy it, but I also buy in the street stalls when I have less money..." (AL, 15yo) "If my older cousin invites me to come over, we will smoke together." (SM, 14yo)
	Smoking place	Their own bedroom The school's bathroom The school's backyard In their hangout place On the beach At a friend's house	"At nights when all my family is asleep, I will smoke in my own room..." (AY, 13 yo) "I smoke in the school's bathroom with a friend, and also in the back of the school..." (DN, 16yo) "There's a place to hang out (and to smoke)" (MS, 17yo) "...I like to go out to the beach in the evening with my friends, and sometimes we smoke there" (KH, 18yo) "... In my friend's house when all of their family went out" (UL, 15yo)

Table 1. Continued.

Theme	Category	Coding	Quotation
Smoking behavior process	Do the parents know?	Do not know Maybe know	"My parents didn't know..." (ST, 15yo) "...I don't know if they already know or what... the one who knows I'm smoking is my younger brother and it's alright, ..." (MR, 16yo)
	What would you do if your parents find out	Would keep silent about it Trying to explain Be normal Trying to stop (smoking) Apologize Crying Does not care	" ... I'll apologize and maybe I will try to stop (smoking)" (DN, 16yo) "... I will try to explain the reason why I smoke ..." (FJ, 17 yo) "... Maybe I will cry... and apologize to them" (ST, 15yo) "...I don't care if my parents find out"(MR, 16 yo)
Family and society's condition	Smokers in the family	Father Uncle Aunt Younger brother Older brother Female cousin	" ... My father, uncle, my younger and older brother are also smoking..." (AY, 13yo) "... Since my aunt became a TKI (Indonesian migrant workers) in the Arab she has already been smoking..."(AL, 15yo) "... My older cousin is also my smoking friend"(SM, 14yo)
	Friends who smoke	Many	" ... There are a lot of them. My school friends, especially the boys" (KH, 18yo)
	Who do you have the most trust in?	Boyfriend/girlfriend Friend No one	"...I like to talk with my boyfriend" (MS, 17yo) "...the one who knows all my stories is my close friend" (FJ, 17yo) "... I trust no one" (KH, 18yo)
The meaning of smoking	How do your parents respond when they discover you smoke?	They will get mad Definitely will scold They will let them/do not care	"They're probably mad since I'm a girl..." (ST, 15yo) "... They will scold me..." (13yo) "... I don't care, they rarely come home" (MR, 16yo)
	The viewpoint of young female smokers	Indifferent Stubborn Naughty There must be a reason why girls smoke Cool	"..girls who smoke must have their own personal reasons, you can't generalize..." (DS, 18yo) "...people called us stubborn, maybe it's true, because I feel I'm one, hahaha" (MS, 17yo) "... it's a common thing..." (AL, 15yo) "... it's cool, different from the others" (KH, 18yo)
	The significance of smoking	Stress reliever Best friend	"Smoking makes me relaxed and relieved...my distress is gone and I'm free" (DS, 18yo) "When I'm lonely, as long as there is a cigarette to smoke, I'm cool, since it is my best friend" (MR, 16yo)

encouraged experimentation, reinforcing their willingness to try smoking. Participants often described cigarettes as a “friend” that is consistently present and capable of alleviating emotional burdens. For instance, smoking helped them manage stress during conflicts with parents or romantic partners, providing a sense of relief and improved emotional well-being.

Furthermore, smoking was identified as a behavior used to fill a perceived void in life. Feelings of meaninglessness, boredom, and apathy characterized this state. Adolescents who are unable to satisfy their need for meaning may experience internal emptiness and dissatisfaction, leading them to engage in behaviors, such as smoking, that they believe can mitigate these negative emotions.

Participants also interpreted smoking as a response to disappointment and frustration. They perceived the habit as a source of pleasure and a means of alleviating negative emotions, believing that their actions did not harm others. Frustration was described as a state in which there is a perceived mismatch between the individual’s biological, psychological, or social resources and the demands of their environment, whether real or perceived. In addition, participants viewed smoking as an effective strategy for diverting conflict. Their engagement in smoking was primarily driven by emotional considerations, particularly in response to challenges within the family environment. Adolescents perceived smoking as a practical method for temporarily forgetting their problems and alleviating emotional distress.

Participants perceived smoking as a source of pleasure and enjoyment. They reported that smoking allowed them to release their problems and experience a sense of comfort. The act of smoking itself was described as calming, with participants likening the exhalation of cigarette smoke to the release of their worries. Cigarettes were frequently described as “faithful friends” that were consistently present in all situations. Participants emphasized that cigarettes were always available, accompanying them daily and providing support during various activities and challenging moments. When friends were absent, cigarettes were perceived as a reliable companion, offering comfort during feelings of emptiness or loneliness.

Discussion

The Emergence of Smoking Habit in Adolescent Girls

The findings of this study revealed that several social factors contribute to the development of smoking habits among teenage girls. These include imitating their peers and having family members who smoke and live in the same household. Family members identified as smokers included fathers, uncles, aunts, brothers, and cousins. The smoking behavior of adolescents is significantly influenced by the presence of smoking family members (18). Parenting plays a crucial role during the developmental stages of adolescents, serving as a key factor in shaping behavioral patterns. In particular, Muslim adolescents in Indonesia are profoundly influenced by their parents

or guardians, who act as role models within a family-centered culture. This strong familial influence appears to facilitate the adoption of smoking behaviors among adolescent girls (19-22).

In addition to the influence of family members, participants emphasized the role of peer environments in initiating smoking. Friends often encouraged them to experiment with cigarettes, which eventually led to habitual smoking. This finding aligns with prior research identifying peer influence as a major determinant of adolescent smoking behavior. Key contributing factors include having friends who are addicted to smoking, being offered cigarettes, and the easy accessibility of tobacco products. Moreover, peer pressure emerged as a significant factor associated with smoking among adolescents. The results of this study reaffirm previous findings that highlight the importance of peer influence in the initiation and maintenance of smoking behaviors among students. Teenagers tend to feel more comfortable discussing mutual interests with their peers, including smoking, and those who have friends who smoke are considerably more likely to adopt the same behavior.

Aside from the encouragement received from family members and peers, several personal factors also motivated teenage girls to smoke. These included stress arising from family difficulties and experiences of heartbreak. Participants reported smoking to alleviate emotional tension and elevate their mood. Previous studies have emphasized adolescents’ perception of a link between smoking and stress relief, indicating that they often view smoking as an effective coping mechanism for reducing psychological distress. Early initiation of smoking in response to familial, romantic, or academic problems is a common reaction to such stressors. Many adolescents firmly believe that smoking helps to relieve stress.

Furthermore, the participants reported that their motivation to smoke stemmed primarily from curiosity about the taste of cigarettes rather than external pressure or compulsion from others. Curiosity emerged as a key trigger for smoking initiation among adolescents, driven by several factors such as the desire to experience the taste of cigarettes, the pervasive influence of advertisements, and the constant visibility of cigarette vendors that heightened their temptation to experiment. Participants also noted that the affordability of cigarettes and the ability to purchase them individually made access easier, enabling them to buy cigarettes using their daily pocket money. This finding aligns with previous research indicating that purchasing power and the easy accessibility of cigarettes contribute significantly to adolescents’ interest in smoking (23).

Numerous media sources portray smoking as a behavior that induces calmness and reduces negative emotions such as anger and distress. While such effects may be partially experienced, this perception further reinforces smoking behavior among teenage girls. Exposure to positive imagery of smoking through various media, whether auditory, visual, or written, encourages

adolescents to view smoking as a socially desirable and emotionally stabilizing activity. Consequently, teenagers who internalize these images may begin smoking and subsequently find it difficult to quit, as the behavior becomes associated with comfort and relaxation. This dynamic was echoed by participants, who expressed feeling more relaxed and at ease when smoking.

The Smoking Behavior Process

Nine of the eleven participants in this study reported that they smoked in private and were uncertain whether their parents were aware of their behavior. They expressed concern that their parents might discover their smoking habit. Participants acknowledged that smoking is still considered unconventional and socially inappropriate for females, in contrast to males, for whom it is viewed as more socially acceptable. The participants reported smoking in various locations, including their bedrooms, school bathrooms, school backyards, social gathering spots, at home, and on the beach. Furthermore, eight of the eleven participants indicated that they preferred to smoke alone rather than with friends or peers. They explained that solitary smoking was more relaxing and provided them with a sense of calmness, noting that they frequently engaged in this activity within the privacy of their rooms.

In response to the question of what would happen if their parents discovered that they smoked, eight participants stated that their parents would be furious and “throw a tantrum.” One participant mentioned that they would likely be scolded and subsequently advised to quit, while another reported being indifferent, and one participant was uncertain about their parents’ possible reaction. Previous studies have shown that most parents disapprove of their children smoking (24, 25), especially if they are female. Moreover, research indicates that female smokers in Indonesia continue to face social stigma, particularly in Muslim-majority areas (20). In this study, all participants wore the hijab as a symbol of their religious faith. They expressed that they did not view their smoking as conflicting with their religious identity, reasoning that smoking is not a criminal act that causes harm to others, such as stealing, hitting someone, or committing murder.

Previous research on hijab-wearing smokers has shown that by embracing their identity, expressing themselves freely, and demonstrating good conduct and ethics, these individuals can maintain social relationships with their non-smoking peers. The findings suggest that, to avoid confrontation, a hijab-wearing smoker often suppresses aspects of her internal identity, creating tension with her external social identity. Furthermore, not all girls who wear the hijab do so following strong religious convictions; some wear it as a fashion statement or to fulfill their parents’ expectations (26, 27).

The Meaning of Smoking

The meaning of smoking emerged as a central theme in the questions posed to participants during the in-

depth interviews. Meaning is inherently individual and subjective, as what may hold significance for one person may be irrelevant to another. Furthermore, meanings can evolve, shaped by personal experiences and changing social contexts. Meaning is constructed through the interpretation of actions and behaviors. The participants’ interpretations of smoking were diverse and distinctive, reflecting each individual’s perception of her own behavior. Although meaning is personal, it also encompasses a social dimension, as it is influenced by broader cultural and societal contexts. Culture provides a framework or background for interpretation; however, it ultimately remains the individual who defines meaning based on personal intentions and understandings. One participant stated that she perceived smoking as “cool,” “unusual,” and something that made her feel different from other girls. This interpretation is deeply personal, yet socially influenced, as smoking among girls is generally uncommon and thus contributes to a sense of distinctiveness from other females.

For some respondents, smoking represented a form of protest against what they perceived as parental neglect. Nine participants stated that smoking provided them with a sense of independence. Initially, they believed that smoking was inappropriate or unhealthy for girls; however, encouragement from their friends, who suggested that there was nothing wrong with experimenting at a young age, strengthened their desire to try smoking. They also interpreted smoking as a loyal companion that could help alleviate stress. Smoking was viewed as a constant presence that provided comfort, particularly during times of emotional distress, such as conflicts with parents or peers. Moreover, participants described experiencing a pleasurable sensation or “rush” associated with smoking, reinforcing their engagement in the behavior.

Smoking can be understood as a personal choice made to compensate for a perceived lack of meaning in one’s life. A state of meaninglessness is often characterized by fatigue, apathy, and emotional detachment. Individuals who are unable to fulfill their intrinsic need for purpose and meaning may experience an inner sense of emptiness and dissatisfaction. As a result, they may turn to behaviors such as smoking, which they perceive as a means to temporarily alleviate these feelings and restore a sense of relief or fulfillment.

Conclusion

The findings of this study indicated that young women perceive smoking as a “best friend” that provides relief from stress, worries, and social pressures. Smoking is also regarded as a social practice and an outlet for paradoxical emotions, reflecting both comfort and conflict within their lived experiences. From an Islamic perspective, most female adolescents recognize that smoking is not commonly practiced by women and therefore continues to carry negative connotations within society. Curiosity, peer influence, parental smoking behavior, and romantic relationships were identified as key factors initiating

smoking among these participants.

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Authors' Contribution

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Competing Interests

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Ethical Approval

This study obtained ethical approval from the Medical and Health Research Ethics Committee (MHREC), Faculty of Medicine, Public Health and Nursing Universitas Gajah Mada – Dr. Sardjito General Hospital, Indonesia, Ref: KE/FK/1390/EC/2020.

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