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Affirmative Action Bans and Health Risk Behaviors

Abstract

College affirmative action bans were associated with higher rates of smoking and drinking in underrepresented minority 11th and 12th graders, and these students continued to smoke at higher rates into young adulthood. Policymakers should consider unintended public health consequences of proposals, such as affirmative action bans, that may limit socioeconomic opportunities.

Keywords

affirmative action, risky behavior, health equity, equity, minority, college, smoking, drinking

Disciplines

Community Health and Preventive Medicine | Education Policy | Health Policy | Health Services Research | Other Public Health | Public Health | Public Health Education and Promotion | Public Policy | Race and Ethnicity

Comments

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AFFIRMATIVE ACTION BANS AND HEALTH RISK BEHAVIORS

College affirmative action programs give preferential admissions consideration to underrepresented minorities (Blacks, Hispanics, Native Americans) to address historical discrimination. While these policies are intended to expand educational and economic opportunities, they remain controversial. Between 1996 and 2013, nine states banned affirmative action in higher education. This study builds on previous research on the impact of economic opportunity on health behaviors by analyzing whether banning affirmative action is associated with risky behaviors in underrepresented minority teens.

In states with an affirmative action ban, underrepresented minority 11th and 12th graders reported increased rates of risky behaviors compared to peers in states without a ban.



3.8

percentage point increase in smoking, timed with implementation of the ban



5.9

percentage point increase in drinking alcohol*

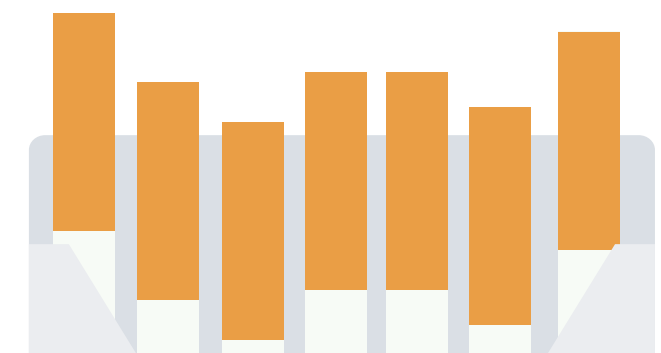
* not statistically significant after adjusting for multiple outcomes



3.5

percentage point increase in binge drinking*

Non-Hispanic Whites did not report a comparable increase in smoking or drinking.



Increased smoking persisted into young adulthood for underrepresented minorities, years after the ban was in place.

1.3 percentage point increase in smoking among 19 to 30-year-olds who lived in states with a ban at age 16, compared to peers in states without a ban.

College affirmative action bans were associated with higher rates of smoking and drinking in underrepresented minority 11th and 12th graders, and these students continued to smoke at higher rates into young adulthood. Policymakers should consider unintended public health consequences of proposals, such as affirmative action bans, that may limit socioeconomic opportunities.