

AIES - FarmaFactoring Foundation
Call for research projects 2011

Do antismoking policies increase obesity?
Research project

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Smoking and obesity are major health issues in modern western societies. While both the medical and the economic literature highlight the link between smoking and eating behavior, it is still unclear whether policies aimed at reducing smoking in the population may backfire and exacerbate the obesity epidemic. This research project aims at filling the gap by using two detailed datasets on implemented smoking policies, nutritional behavior, and consumption.

To evaluate the impact of antismoking policies on food consumption and body weight, we will exploit the geographical and temporal variability of the smoking bans implemented in the U.S. over the last 20 years. This allows for a clean quasi-experimental identification of the possible effect of smoking bans on individual food consumption behavior.

Our project will improve on the existing literature both at a normative and a positive level along the following lines. First, we will try to disentangle the direct effects of smoking bans on obesity and the general health condition of subjects, from indirect effects due to, e.g., the change in relative prices of food and hospitality services. Second, given the high frequency and the time span of the data, we will be able to evaluate the effects of the implemented policies both on a short and a long time horizon. Third, we will consider different empirical strategies (an instrumental variable approach and a reduced form approach) and we will compare the results with the existing literature on smoking behavior and obesity. Finally, we will consider whether the smoking bans also affect non-smokers's health-related behavior.