

Holy smoke!

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Total smoking time on screen in 4 recent movies translates into Rs 11.6 crore in ad revenue, suggests NGO research

According to research conducted on four recently-released Bollywood films, the actual depiction of smoking by film stars in these films amounted to a total of 27.25 minutes. And in advertising terms, this total duration could amount to Rs 11.6 crores in revenue! This was suggested in a study done by Mumbai-based NGO Salaam Bombay Foundation. The films -- *Page 3*, *Musafir*, *Shabd* , and *Swades* show actors smoking throughout the film. This comes in the wake of the recent World Health Organisation (WHO) report which suggests that the youth is influenced by watching their cine idols smoking on screen.

Padmini Somani of Salaam Bombay says, "Who is watching these films? The youth." She further points out that films like *Saathiya* and *Kaante* also had actors smoking throughout the film. The NGO cites research done by Dr Stanton Glantz of the University of California, San Francisco. According to WHO, exposure to smoking in movies influences adolescents. Smoking in the movies is the most powerful pro-tobacco influence on kids today, accounting for 52 percent of adolescents who start smoking -- an effect that is even stronger than cigarette advertising, says the research. Leena Yadav, director of *Shabd* , justifies the depiction of smoking. "We wanted to depict the intensity of Sanjay Dutt's character. Here, it was one of the props that conveyed that a man is immersed in his work. It's more of a vice," she says. But she adds, "I don't think smoking can be equated with being cool. Otherwise Zayed Khan, who is portraying a much cooler image in the film, would have been shown smoking. We do not want to promote smoking. " However, the research by Dr Glantz says that stories with charismatic actors are a powerful way to attract new smokers. But filmmaker Madhur Bhandarkar denies that his film *Page 3* has any surrogate advertising , "Surrogate advertising in films does not exist," he states.

Somani says that this is not an easy cause to fight for. "We are looking for constructive change. I am hoping to meet the Censor Board this month to come up with guidelines to curb the blatant depiction of smoking in films," she concludes.