

Interplay of socio-spatial and other factors to produce situational substance use or abstinence in young, socially integrated users of alcohol or cigarettes

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Introduction

Environmental prevention seeks to prevent substance use by modifying environmental factors and cues (Oncioiu et al., 2018). However, prior aetiological research in this area has focussed on environmental factors as perceived by researchers or policy-makers or has not considered preventive applications.

Research question: How do environmental factors as perceived by potential target populations relate to their own substance use?

Mixed-Methods Approach

Interview participants (24 female students aged 18-26 years reporting recent alcohol or cigarette use but no illicit substance use) listed spaces representing different everyday situations. Using repertory grids, each space was characterised verbally and numerically. Interviews focussed on "liked"/ "disliked" aspects of spaces to elicit salient factors (i.e., not substance use specific ones). Substance use data were collected separately for each space. Verbal data were subjected to content analysis (Jankowicz, 2004; Gläser & Laudel 2010), while numerical data were collated into supergrids (Wright, 2004). Study participants did not compare spaces according to substance use, but spaces were compared by substance use pattern during analysis. Environmental factors were conceptualised as socio-spatial dimensions (Löw, 2016).

Implications for Prevention

- Physical aspects (e.g. built environment), although a major focus of prior studies in this field, were not found to be important to this study population.
- Substances can be understood to signify the situations in which they are used, and vice versa.
- Socio-spatial dimensions are key mediators in the mechanisms resulting in specific (situational) substance use outcomes.
- The newly identified framework of socio-spatial dimensions and example pathways may point to new intervention points and avenues for environmental or other preventive action.

References

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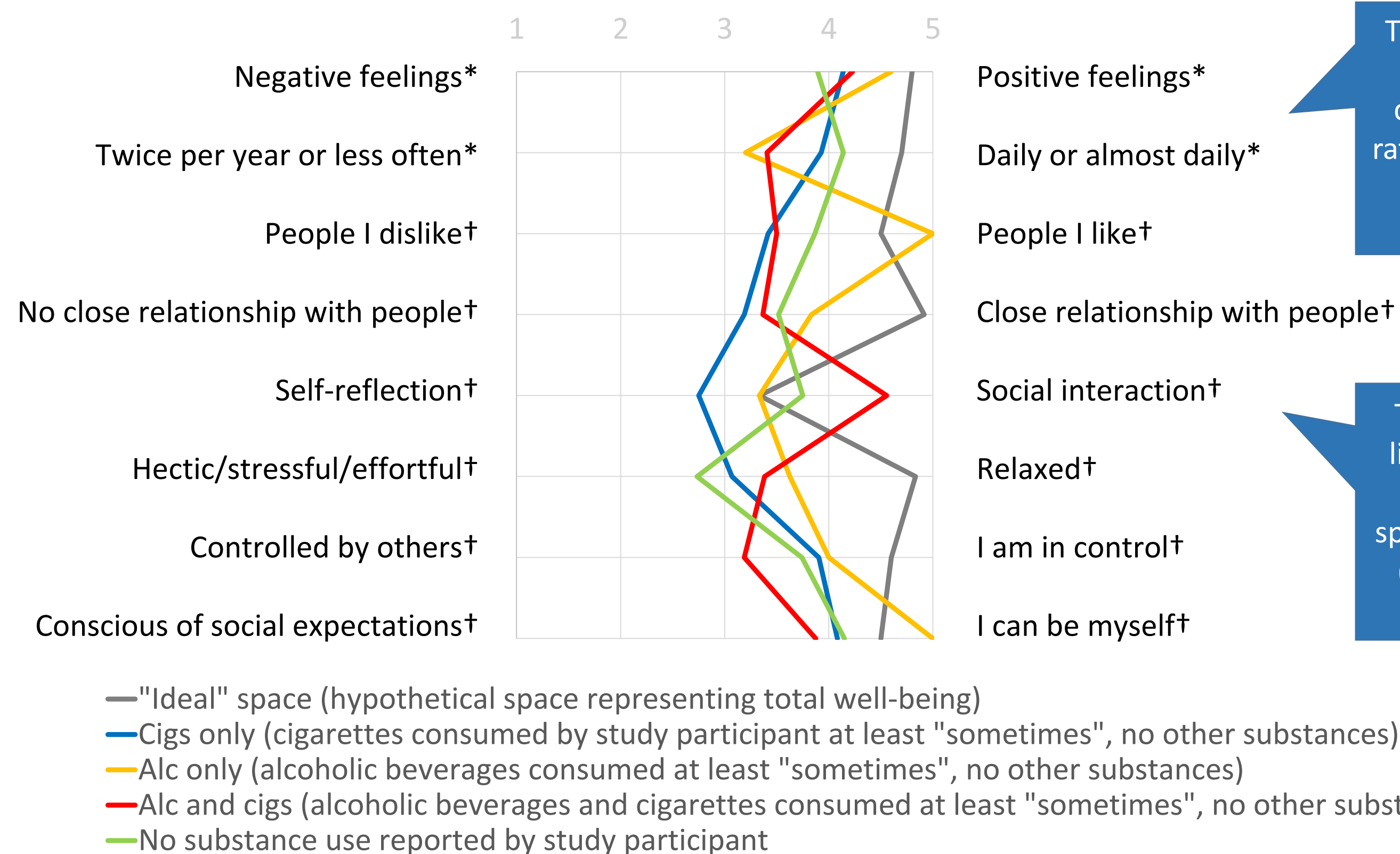
Selected Findings

- Study participants reported 296 individual everyday spaces and 108 salient environmental factors. Content analysis reduced these to 29 socio-spatial dimensions, grouped in eight categories (Table 1).
- Figure 1 shows how spaces representing different substance use patterns were rated by the sub-sample of smokers (n=10). Spaces of no substance use were perceived most negatively and differed most from participants' hypothetical "ideal" space.
- Dimensions such as "Controlled by others vs I am in control" may play a key role in determining whether spaces of no substance use are perceived negatively (and thus avoided; Figure 2) or positively (data not shown) by smokers.

Table 1: Socio-spatial dimensions of importance to young, socially integrated users of alcohol or cigarettes

Category (Nr of socio-spatial dimensions contained within)	Example of socio-spatial dimension
Characteristics of people (9)	e.g., People I dislike vs. People I like
Characteristics of activity (3)	e.g., Self-reflection vs. Social interaction
Distinctiveness of space (3)	e.g., Special occasion vs. Everyday
Feelings and atmospheres (4)	e.g., Hectic/stressful/effortful vs. Relaxed
Substance use specific characteristics (2)	e.g., Prevailing norms for substance use vs. Prevailing norms against substance use
Power relations (4)	e.g., Controlled by others vs. I am in control
Material aspects (3)	e.g., Indoors vs. Outdoors
Sense of time (1)	Open-ended vs. Limited duration

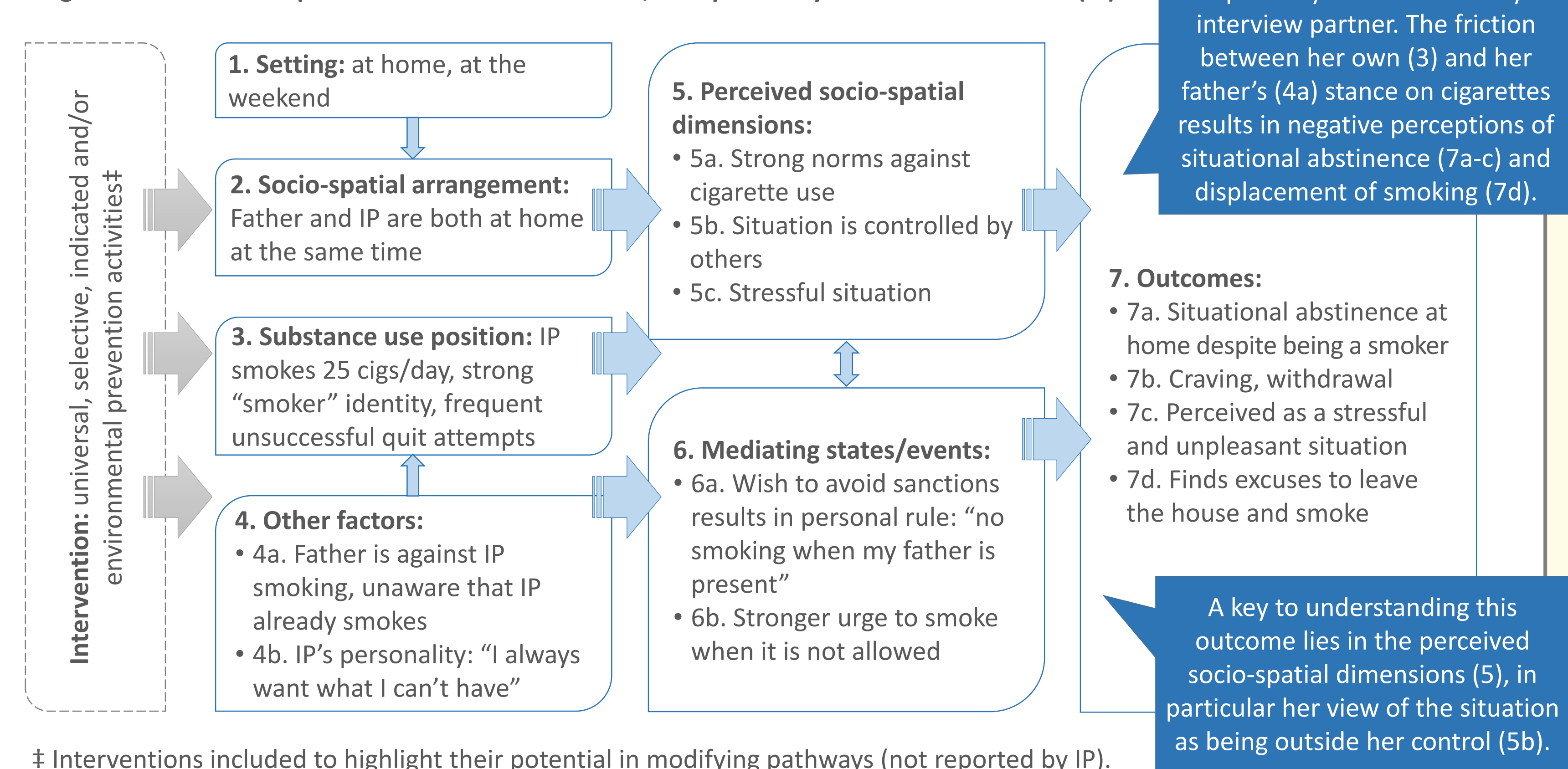
Figure 1: Smokers' characterisation of their everyday spaces (mean values on nine dimensions, spaces grouped according to substance use pattern) (n=10)



The phrases left and right of the figure make up bipolar dimensions. Study participants rated everyday spaces from 1 (left phrase) to 5 (right phrase) on these dimensions.

To read this graph, choose two lines (e.g. green = no substance use; grey = hypothetical ideal space) and study their similarities (lines close to each other) and differences (lines far apart).

Figure 2: A "stressful" path to situational abstinence, as reported by an Interview Partner (IP)



This pathway was described by an interview partner. The friction between her own (3) and her father's (4a) stance on cigarettes results in negative perceptions of situational abstinence (7a-c) and displacement of smoking (7d).

A key to understanding this outcome lies in the perceived socio-spatial dimensions (5), in particular her view of the situation as being outside her control (5b).

† Interventions included to highlight their potential in modifying pathways (not reported by IP).