

Uncovering the Hidden Latency of TPB Beliefs: A Person-Centered Methodological Approach Using Adolescent Smoking Data from China

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Abstract:

Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) research often treats behavioral, normative, and control beliefs as observable predictors of intention, while their hidden latency remains under-examined. This paper proposes a methodological framework for uncovering latent belief configurations: unevenly activated patterns that sit beneath stated intentions and become consequential under specific social, emotional, and situational conditions. Using adolescent smoking beliefs in Yunnan Province, China, as an empirical illustration, the paper combines regression-based key-belief identification with latent class analysis to move from aggregate prediction to person-centered belief profiling. Survey data from 951 high-school students were used to identify beliefs associated with smoking intention and to examine heterogeneous profiles among female and male adolescents. The findings show that intervention-relevant beliefs were less about general health risks than about school pressure, emotional relief, peer approval, encouragement, and the perceived benefits of not smoking. Distinct profiles emerged, including socially conscious and hesitant girls, and anti-smoking, anxious, and stressed-out boys. The paper argues that this approach reveals hidden TPB belief latency and supports more precise, context-sensitive behavioral interventions.

Keywords:

Theory of Planned Behavior, latent beliefs, hidden latency, key beliefs, latent class analysis, adolescent smoking, health behavior, person-centered methodology, China, behavioral intervention.