This audio documentary tackles the social addiction behind smoking, which is the leading cause for lung cancer, the most common type of cancer.

When you first think about the addiction of smoking, the first thing that pops into your mind is the chemical addiction behind it, however, it is more than that. People often start smoking due to a social habit for example.

I visited Psychiatrist Amr Ali to explain more what are the main motives behind this social stigma.

AMR ALI (AA): "I think in my opinion usually people and often smoke at first the socialize or to feel this self belonging towards a group and however they don't see the dangers of such habit developing." (00:20)

Many become attracted to this habit from a very young age without knowing the dangers behind it.

AA: “I believe more than 80% or a high percentage of smokers let's not say statistics start usually as a social habit and it gets developed into an addiction to nicotine usually in cigarettes. I think this awareness at home should be made and set an example and a model for the children at early days to avoid such bad habits and attitudes to developing.” (00:31)

Ahmed Ismail who fell as a victim of this social addiction at a considerably young age explains how it all started.

AHMED ISMAIL (AI): “Well how smoking started, I was in high school you know smoking school like I used to see kids older than you smoking outside of
school and just look at them like wow man must be getting all the girls you know, so that was the first notion.” (00:19)

Peer pressure also known as social pressure can play an influential role in getting a grasp on this habit.

AI: "And then my friends actually started smoking; my close friends so I was like why not and I did, I started.” (00:06)

Laila Nasser is also another victim of peer pressure that actually started from a very young age.

LAILA NASSER (LN): "I remember actually sneaking out after school with some girl friends there was this shisha place next to our school, I think we were only like 15 and there's this sense of like rebellion and like I'm against authority my parents authority because I had very strict parents and it was like my way of like feeling like I was doing something that like behind there back or something I was taking control of myself and doing what I wanted like didn't matter what they were thinking.” (00:28)

And does Laila remember her first cigarette?

LN: “I've had my cigarette at a shisha place with my best friend we had it together and um.” (00:09)

Is your best friend the one standing outside?

LN: “Yeah it is, and I remember because our friends other friends had their packs with them; cigarette packs and I was just holding it; it wasn't even lit it shows how I felt it was elegant to hold it.” (00:14)

SFX: FADE IN: DJ stop [00:03:17 -- 00:03:19]

Hold on hold on, elegant? uhm care explaining what's so elegant about it?

MUSIC: FADE OUT: “Floating in Space” [00:01:39-- 00:03:17]

MUSIC: FADE IN: “Sexy” [00:03:26-- 00:04:38]

SFX: FADE IN: Wolf whistle [00:03:30 -- 00:03:32]

LN: “Cause when I think about smoking I usually imagine Kate Moss or Marilyn Monroe or Audrey Hepburn all of these feminine symbols and like smoking and they looked so elegant and classy and it was just like a romanticized version of smoking.” (00:18)

Ah okay, makes sense. Please Laila proceed with your first smoking experience.
LN: “The guy that comes and serves the shisha he was like do you want me to light it for you and I’m like sure why not, and then he lit mine and then my bestfriends and at first I hated it; I shocked like I was used to shisha and I was used how easy it is to take a drag from shisha and then I did the same with the cigarette and I basically died coughing.” (00:17)

Okay Laila, earlier you mentioned all these celebrities and their influence on you.

Where did you get in touch with them?

LN: “Like usually I’d go on Tumblr because it was very in when I was fifteen sixteen and there where all of these artsy pictures; black and white or like with them smoking or holding a cigarette and it looked so beautiful to me.” (00:14)

Of course the media has the ability and the power to influence people into a certain habit - and yes similar to Laila, Ahmed was also influenced by it.

MUSIC: FADE OUT: “Sexy” [00:03:26 -- 00:04:38]

MUSIC: FADE IN: “Only Time” by Enya [00:04:39 -- 00:04:58]

AI: “there was actually an advert that really affected me, the Davidoff advert I don’t know if you remember it but it was like same thing a cool guy in a bar smoking a cigarette and he like looks at a girl with a cigarette in his mouth, smoke coming out and she looks at him she's like oh and she comes up to him and that’s the ad like he got the girl.” (00:19)

MUSIC: FADE OUT: “Only Time” by Enya [00:04:39 -- 00:04:58]

MUSIC: FADE IN: “Sexy” [00:04:59 -- 00:06:06]

Okay, both Laila and Ahmed shared almost an identical story with both of them getting socially introduced to smoking since their school days. However, how did university influence this habit?

AI: “Well, when I got first when I was like a freshman at the beginning my smoking increased because I didn't have most of my friends from school so I was like the first few semesters alone so like you smoke more when you’re alone until you make friends, and I made friends quite quickly but it increased my smoking was like a lot more cause I think when you're freshman you're still at that point you still haven’t grown up as much and you still want to be accepted by like college kids; now you're in college now I have to be more cool.” (00:34)

As well as for Laila, it wasn't any different.
LN: “First when I got in, I had quit and for the first few months I like went back to buying a pack a day at least and then I decided I need to like tone it down.” (00:14)

MUSIC: FADE OUT: “Sexy” [00:04:59 -- 00:06:06]

MUSIC: FADE IN: “Better Days” [00:06:07 -- 00:07:11]

Yes Laila is toning down her smoking and Ahmed quit six months ago. The number of young Egyptian smokers is on the rise and according to statistics by Egypt’s Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics, the number of smokers in Egypt in 2016 reached 13 million having 60 percent of them acquiring this habit at the age of 18 or younger.

Most of the time, it starts all fun and games without fully understanding the negative effects of such habit that has the potential, with time, to become a deadly one.

This audio documentary was produced by Karim Mourtada for the audio production course at the American University in Cairo taught by professor Kim Fox in spring 2017. Special thanks to Dr. Amr Ali, Laila Nasser and Ahmed Ismail. The royalty free music used in this documentary are From Ben sound.org and purple planet and only time by Enya. Sound effects are from freesound.org.

MUSIC: FADE OUT: “Better Days” [00:06:07 -- 00:07:11]