Should parents be punished for smoking in the presence of their children?

I. Introduction

Tobacco remains one of the most prominent industries, with countless different brands available. While everyone is free to make their choice of whether to partake in smoking, it is noteworthy that not only does it cause harm to oneself but also to others surrounding them. ”Approximately 60 percent of nonsmokers in the United States have biological evidence of exposure to secondhand smoke (Carmona, 2006, p. 3).” Millions of children are exposed to secondhand smoke at home. “Among children younger than 18 years of age, an estimated 22 percent are exposed to secondhand smoke in their homes, with estimates ranging from 11.7 percent in Utah to 34.2 percent in Kentucky (Carmona, 2006, p. 3).” This may lead to some serious diseases such as: asthma, respiratory infections, and an increased risk of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS). Parents might be unaware of the harm they cause to those around them, which is why it is important to fully comprehend the consequences that may result from smoking and using any kind of substance. This essay will make the case that parents have a duty to ensure their children’s wellbeing and should refrain from smoking in front of them owing to the serious health risks and psychological effects.

It is no surprise that smoking tobacco is bad for health. While everyone is free to make their choices, smokers need to consider their surroundings, especially their own children. Even though it might not be as dangerous as actual smoking it is still harmful for health nevertheless. Diseases that are link with second hand smoking are Heart disease, stroke, lung cancer, and others. **This article** (U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2024)provides data that showcases how dangerous second hand smoking can be: “Since 1964, about 2,500,000 people who did not smoke died from health problems caused by secondhand smoke exposure. Among adults who do not smoke, secondhand smoke causes nearly 34,000 premature deaths from heart disease each year in the U.S. Secondhand smoke causes more than 7,300 lung cancer deaths each year among U.S. adults who do not smoke.”

While this data mostly focuses on adults in the US, having children experience second hand smoking should have even worse consequences. Given the fact that kids are still in their developing phase.

Children usually imitate what they see around them. So seeing their parents smoke may very well lead them to try smoking from a very young age. So not only does second hand smoking harm their health they might pick up the habit too. This may lead to addiction which in turn leads to many diseases mentioned in the previous paragraph. Even if they don’t pick up such an addictive habit they still are exposed to diseases which are exclusive to children. Such as respiratory infections, ear infections, and asthma attacks. In infants there’s a chance SIDS (sudden infant death syndrome) might occur. Kids having exposure to smoking at such a young age could also lead to mental problems. According to **this(https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9885444/#:~:text=We%20also%20found%20that%20SHS,problems%2C%20and%20adolescent%20smoking32.)** there is a high correlation between ADHD and second hand smoking. Learning disability is also prevalent with children whose parents are smokers. The reason being is that nicotine interferes with brain development since its function is not stable until 12 years of age.

This alarming combination of physical and cognitive risks raises serious concerns about whether simply warning parents about these dangers is enough. Should there be harsher penalties for exposing children to secondhand smoke, or perhaps more stringent preventive measures to safeguard children’s health and development?

Considering all the negative impacts of smoking, both directly and through secondhand exposure, it is reasonable to assume that parents should be held accountable for such actions. Some may argue that such behavior should be illegal and in extreme cases they should be faced with criminal charges for it. It may be argued that putting own children in such bad environment may be viewed as child abuse. **Article(https://www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/family-dynamics/types-of-families/Pages/Secondhand-Smoke-and-Child-Custody.aspx#:~:text=According%20to%20federal%20law%2C%20child,a%20child%20has%20a%20health)** says that one side of judges views this as a criminal act so parents should lose custody over their children, and the other side views this as symptom of addiction which requires proper treatment rather than punishment. When the parent is self-aware of their actions and they still willingly continue to expose their kids to such dangers, it definitely should be considered as child abuse, because it is parent’s duty to provide healthy and safe environment for their children. On the other hand, cases where parents are struggling with nicotine addiction may require more nuanced solutions, such as counseling or rehabilitation, rather than immediate punishment. The issue remains subjective and complex, but one thing is clear: quitting smoking and adopting a healthier lifestyle is undeniably beneficial for both parents and their children. Ensuring that children grow up in a smoke-free environment not only protects their health but also sets a positive example for them to follow in the future.

III. Conclusion

While smoking is a harmful personal choice, doing so in the presence of children endangers their health and well-being. The damage that secondhand smoking causes in children is evident and parents should be held accountable for those consequences. They have legal responsibility to ensure their kids grow up in a healthy, smoke-free environment whether at home or in any other setting. Not being able to fulfill parental role might have long term effect on child’s mental and physical well-being. Considering the severe risks associated with secondhand smoke, stronger measures may be necessary to protect children, including legal penalties for parents who knowingly expose their kids to such harm. While some argue that addiction may complicate these issues, the protection of children should remain a priority. Striking a balance between treatment and accountability is essential, but what remains clear is that providing a smoke-free environment is one of the most impactful ways to safeguard children's health and ensure a better future for them.