

# WHEN THE UNIVERSITY OF GENEVA CONDUCTED RESEARCH ON CHILDREN FOR PHILIP MORRIS

Research on risk perception conducted in the 1990s by the Faculty of Psychology on behalf of the tobacco company

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Risk perception in children

From 1994 to 1997, Philip Morris paid nearly 190,000 CHF to Elsa Schmid-Kitsikis, a professor of clinical psychology at the University of Geneva. Together with her assistant Helga Kilcher, she was commissioned to collect data on risk perception among children and adolescents. In 1994 alone, 186 children between the ages of 9 to 17 took part in tests conducted by the two scientists (no figures are available for subsequent years).

### Philip Morris was not acting as a philanthropist

The intentions of Philip Morris were clear:

- To collect data on risk perception and smoking initiation among children;
- To highlight the crucial role of social and environmental factors in the perception of smoking, in order to downplay, or even discredit, the idea that advertising is the primary driver;
- To partner with a renowned university to portray the image of a responsible company;
- To build relationships with prominent members of the scientific community to increase the company's influence and strengthen its network of allies.

### Collaborations that are still relevant today

Today, the University of Geneva prohibits any collaboration with the tobacco industry, a measure adopted after the Rylander affair<sup>1</sup>. However, most Swiss universities do not apply such restrictions. In fact, more than half of them still maintain collaborations with this sector today, as revealed by the survey published by OxySuisse in February 2026<sup>2</sup>. The history of the tobacco industry is marked by decades of scientific manipulation, the concealment of the risks associated with its products, and aggressive lobbying aimed at undermining public health policy. In this context, any collaboration with this industry poses significant risks for academic institutions: threats to scientific integrity, infringement of academic freedom, lack of transparency in research, and reputational damage.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://transparencyandtruth.ch/en/ressource/the-university-of-zurich-philip-morris-case/><sup>2</sup> <https://transparencyandtruth.ch/ressource/industrie-tabac-universites-suisse/>

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