

TOBACCO SMOKING AND ATTITUDE OF YOUTH: A SURVEY OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The aim of this study was to detect a smoking pattern in youth (university student) in Peshawar.

Material and Methods: The survey, aimed at smoking pattern in the university students in Peshawar, was conducted on 275 students with 195 (70.9%) males and 80 (29.1%) females. The total number of smokers was 92(33.5%) consisting of 49(31.8%) medical, 21(38.8%) engineering and 22(32.8%) students from other departments.

Results: Smoking was more prevalent among males (36%) than females (11.3%) ($P<0.05$); and among self financed (44.4 to 44.8%) than regular (19.2 to 36.1%) students ($P<0.05$). Majority of the students whether smokers (96.3%), ($P<0.05$) or non-smokers (92.4%), ($P<0.05$), were aware of even the passive smoking hazards. A significant number of smokers 36.6% ($P<0.05$) and 41.5% ($P<0.05$) would not favour a ban on smoking at public places and a ban on smoking ads respectively. Moreover, a significant number of male (27.4%) and female (36.3%) smokers started smoking as a school child. Smokers were inspired from friends (64%). The urge for smoking was in friend's company (33%), when tense (33%), sitting idle (20%) and over worked (14%). The most popular smoking tool was "filter-tipped cigarette" (66.7%). Other substance abuse, found in smokers only, included marijuana (50%), alcohol (43.8%) and other substances (6.2%).

Conclusion: Thus smoking is a serious problem in educated youth, and urgent measures need to be taken to change their attitude towards smoking.

Key words: Smoking, attitude in University students.

INTRODUCTION

Smoking related health hazards were first brought to public attention in 1964¹. But unfortunately even the educated lot underestimates considerably the health hazards of tobacco. Thus many people still smoke and many young people begin smoking each year. Most smokers begin smoking in adolescence². Approximately 80% tobacco users initiate use before the age of 18 years³. Some years ago tobacco was found to be on top of the list showing preventable causes of death in the United States⁴. Smoking kills approximately, 430, 000, people each year in the United States². According to the world Bank statistics published in 1999; the estimated number of smokers globally is 1.1 billion (80% of these belong to low and middle income countries); 82 to 99 thousands new young people start smoking each day; and tobacco kills 04 million peoples each years (one in 10 adult deaths). To have an idea of the magnitude of tobacco consumption in our local youth, a survey was conducted in the university students in Peshawar.

OBJECTIVES

1. To know about smoking habits of students.
2. To have an idea of students' awareness of smoking related health hazards.
3. To know about students' appreciation of the seriousness of the problem.
4. Other substance abuse and its relation to tobacco abuse in students.
5. To analyze the effects of various factors influencing students smoking habits.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The study was conducted on university students in Peshawar during May, 2000. The

study population included medical students, engineering students and students from various department of the university. The students were asked to fill up a preset questionnaire.

STATISTICAL TEST

For nominal data chi square test and for numerical data t-test was used.

RESULTS

The number of questionnaires distributed among students was 302. Out of those 27 were discarded because those were not seriously filled. Thus the total study population was 275 with 195 (70.9%) males and 80 (29.1%) females. There were 154 medical students, 54 engineering students and 67 students from various department of the university.

The total number of smokers was 92(33.5%) while 183(66.5%) were non-smokers ($P<0.05$). This means that every third university student was found to be a smoker (Fig-1). This trend was constant with only subtle differences in students from various colleges and departments of the university. The smokers among medical, engineering and other departments' students were 49(31.8%), 21(38.8%) and 22(32.8%) respectively.

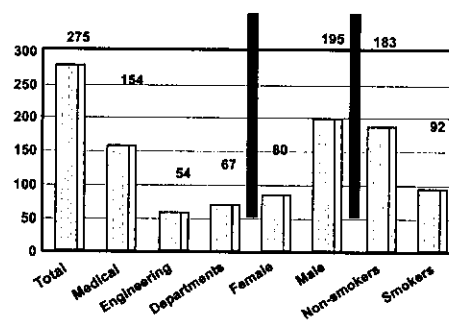


Fig. 1: Study Population Break Up

The medical and engineering students were also divided into regular and self financed students. The number of smokers among medical students was 15(19.2%) and 34(44.8%) respectively for regular and self financed students ($P<0.05$), while 12 (33.3%) and 08 (44.4%) engineering students were smokers among regular and self financed students respectively ($P<0.05$). This clearly indicates higher smoking rates among self financed students. (Fig-II)

Further break-up of the regular medical students revealed 09(36%) and 06(11.3%) smokers among the male and female students respectively ($P<0.05$), indicating higher smoking rates among males.

The awareness among students regarding the health hazards of even passive smoking showed encouraging figures. 251 students responded to this question. Among the smokers 77(96.3%) while among the non-smokers 158(92.4%) students were aware of the passive smoking hazards ($P<0.05$); the awareness was rather uniform among students i.e. 144(96%) Medical, 31(91.2%) Engineering and 60(89.6%) students from other departments of the university were aware of smoking hazards ($P>0.05$) (Fig-III).

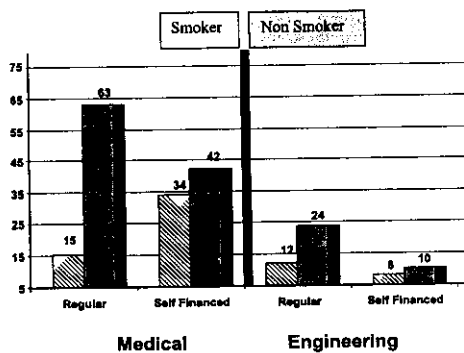


Fig. II: Difference in smoking habits between regular and self-financed students

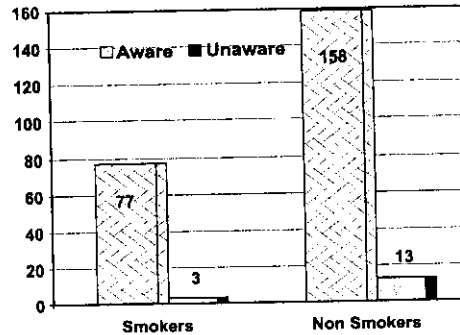


Fig. III: Passive Smoking-Hazards

The number of students responding to the question aimed at students' attitude towards smoking at public places and cigarette advertisements in print and electronic media was 256 and 254 respectively. Majority of the students, especially non-smokers, favoured banning smoking at public places i.e. 63.4% smokers and 89.0% non-smokers ($P<0.05$). But unfortunately a significant number of students, especially smokers, were against banning smoking ads in media, i.e., 41.5% smokers and 25.4% non-smokers ($P<0.05$) (Fig-IV).

Surprisingly a significant number of students, both male and female, started smoking as a school child. 27.4% of the male smokers and 36.4% of the female smokers first smoked during their school life.

In response to the question as to what inspired them to take up smoking, the following answers came forward. Friends

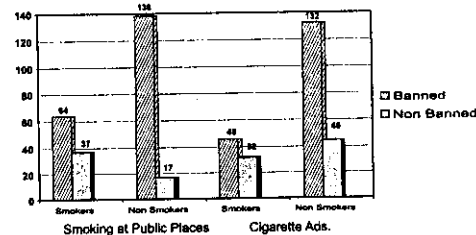


Fig. IV: Smoking at public places and cigarette ads. (students attitude)

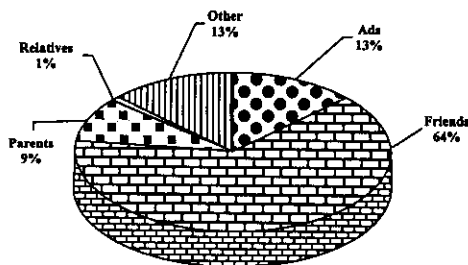


Fig. V: Smoking Factors Inspiring

(64%), ads. (13%), parents (9%), relatives (1%) and other factors (13%) were a source of inspiration for the smokers to start smoking (Fig-V). Moreover, the smokers felt like smoking when they were tense (33%), in friends company (33%), sitting idle (20%) and over-worked (14%), (Fig-VI).

The most popular smoking tool among the smokers was "filter tipped cigarette" (66.7%), followed by "non-filter tipped cigarette (9.7%), "Huqqa" (9.7%), cigar (9.7%) and pipe (6.5%), while 14.5% of the smokers would go for all of the above mentioned smoking tools.

Other substance abuse was found in smokers only and non-smokers were not addicted to other drugs either. The most frequent co-addiction among smokers was marijuana "Chars" (50%), followed by alcohol (43.8%) and other substances (6.2%).

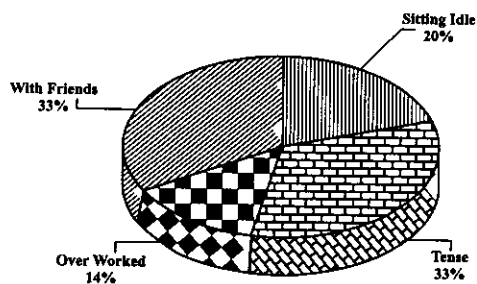


Fig. VI: Smoking Urge

DISCUSSION

It has been pretty long since health hazards were first made public in sixties during the last century. But the problem that still remains is the underestimation of the health hazards of smoking. This is evident from the fact that many people even in the developed countries still smoke and an appreciable number of youngsters begin smoking every year^{1,2,3}. Most smokers begin smoking in adolescence², approximately 80% smokers start smoking before 18 – 20 years of age^{3,10}. Till recently tobacco had been responsible for highest number of deaths in the United States from preventable causes^{4,5}. The problem seems to be immense in countries like Pakistan because developing countries are responsible for 80% of the global tobacco consumption.

Statistics show that tobacco consumption is inversely related to the level of education⁶. Thus the fact that every third student of the University of Peshawar is a smoker can give us an idea of the magnitude of smoking in local population with less or no education.

Tobacco cost is another factor determining smoking prevalence in a community. The higher cost the lower the consumption. As a result effective legislation has been done and increased taxes imposed to keep tobacco prices high in developed countries^{7,8}. The well known cost Vs consumption inverse-relation holds true for smokers in our community as well. This is evident from increased smoking rates among self financed students compared to regular students. But tobacco prices instead of going up have come down recently in Pakistan.

The high rate of smoking despite high degree of awareness of smoking related health hazards speaks for it that the awareness is very superficial even in the educated lot and it does not stop them from smoking. This emphasizes the need for

urgent and mass public education and inclusion of the subject in academic curricula for students. Increased public awareness will also change its attitude towards smoking at public places and smoking ads. in print and electronic media, demanding the authorities to take appropriate measures.

Another matter of great concern, which is also surprising, is the finding that many male and female students take up smoking as school children and are at risk of tobacco related health problems at a very young age. These findings match statistics from other parts of the world^{3,10}.

Therefore it is our duty as a community to be good role models for our youth by not smoking ourselves. Also important are factors like helping our youth select proper friends, providing them with healthy recreational activities and spare some time out of our busy schedule to solve their problems.

Finally, two important facts about smoking need to be addressed. Firstly, filter tipped cigarette are considered safe and therefore most popular among our youth but the fact is that these are not safe. Moreover if the smoker's urge is not satisfied, he can actually increase the delivery of nicotine and tar by controlling the ventilator holes in the filters⁶. Secondly, tobacco serves as an entry drug into the world of drug abuse⁹. This holds true in our study as well, because other substance abuse was found in smokers only.

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