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Attitude of High School Students of Tehran towards Tobacco Use

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ABSTRACT

Background: Cigarette smoking is the first preventable death in the world. Presence of a positive attitude towards tobacco use in young adults is one of the effective factors in starting smoking.

Since it seems that the age of starting smoking has decreased in our society, it is important to recognize the attitudes towards cigarette smoking in this period of life.

Materials and Methods: Therefore, this research was conducted according to WHO questionnaire and Global Youth Tobacco Survey Project (GYTS) and 1119 high school students were chosen randomly from different educational districts of Tehran in the year 2003 and were questioned in this regard.

Results: According to the results of this study 28.2% of students (25.2% female and 30.8% male) smoked occasionally and 4.4% of them (1.5% female and 6.06% male) smoked daily.

44.9% of the students believe that smoker students have less friends (than others) and 41.1% believe that smoker students are less comfortable in the parties.

77.7% of the students believe that there is no difference in attractiveness of smoker and non smoker students.

41.1% of the students consider the smoker boy as a "looser" and 38% of them consider the smoker girl as "stupid". 80.4% of students assume that quitting smoking is very easy.

Conclusion: Although the results of this study show that the attitudes of students towards smoking are not positive but this attitude has not prevented them from smoking and more serious action must be taken. Also, there is no significant difference between the attitudes of smoker and non smoker students. (*Tanaffos* 2004; 3(11): 29-35)

Key words: Cigarette, Students, Attitude

INTRODUCTION

Smoking is considered as the first preventable cause of mortality and morbidity in the world (1).

Cigarette smoking is responsible for 90% of lung

cancers, 40% of other cancers, 50% of cardiovascular diseases, 75% of respiratory diseases, 12 % of all mortalities, and 30% of deaths occurring between the ages of 30 and 50 (2).

Initiation of smoking at young ages is usually due to some important factors such as: imitation of

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adults, curiosity, performing an impertinent action, for fun and persuasion of same age group (3). Besides, presence of a positive attitude (absence of negative attitude) towards smoking can encourage the young adults to try smoking (4).

Knowledge of a matter can produce an attitude and this can be achieved usually by proper information. Positive or negative attitude towards something is not necessarily parallel with acting or not acting (5).

As you may see, many smokers are aware of the harmful effects of smoking (knowledge) and consider that as an improper behaviour (attitude) but still continue smoking.

Creating an attitude towards cigarette smoking depends on the experiences gained by young adults (6). Smoking in society and among the family members can cause a tendency towards smoking while preventive programs can cause negative effect towards it. If parents smoke, the children will do so. It's obvious that cigarettes are very much available in a smoker family. They are also used to the smell and stimulating effects of the cigarette smoke which can addict them at least for the next several years. Some parents even give their own cigarette to their children to smoke at a very young age (7).

Naturally, the child tends to imitate his or her family members. Even some researches have demonstrated that sibling smoking (brother, sister) has even greater influence than parent smoking. However it has been shown that parents' disapproval, even if they are smokers, often decreases the risk of smoking in these children.

On the contrary, smokers who have quit usually have a positive role in encouraging their children to quit.

In many Western countries, efforts are being undertaken to train children before the age at which smoking is started.

Almost all elementary school children (between the ages of 5 to 11) are strongly against smoking. However at the ages of 12 and 13, when the children reach higher classes, force of classmates and others will be increasingly irresistible.

If friends or elder children smoke at school, younger children tend to join them (8).

The aim of this study is to evaluate the attitude of young adults towards cigarette smoking. We selected the age group of 14 to 18 years because according to "National Health Survey" results performed by Health Ministry in 1991, more than 60% of the smokers start smoking at the age of 15 yrs.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This was a cross sectional and analytical study and was performed after obtaining the consent of Ministry of Education and confirming the questionnaire by the research center.

By using EPI info 6 software and randomly selecting, districts 1, 2, 4, 14 and 19 of Tehran were chosen.

By referring to above districts, in addition to informing those involved in the management, list of high schools of each district was obtained. Using random numbers, 10 high schools were selected in each district. The permit to enter the high schools was issued. In each high school one class room was selected. After being explained by physician, the students filled the questionnaire in a calm environment, without the presence of school authorities.

The questionnaire was prepared according to WHO and Global Youth Tobacco Survey Project questionnaire. Data were collected in regard to general information of the young adults, history of daily or occasional cigarette smoking, knowledge about the harmful effects of smoking, effects of being a passive smoker, students' attitude towards a

smoker person, the number of friends and their attractiveness, being comfortable among the others, and difficulty of quitting smoking.

Data forms were entered the SPSS-11.5 software and related data bank was analyzed. To explain the information in this research, crude and relative frequencies have been demonstrated in related tables. To analyze the correlation between the variables, chi-square test was used with a significance value of $p < 0.05$.

RESULTS

Total of 1119 high school students of Tehran were questioned in this study among those 718 (64.2%) were male. The age range of students was 14(4.4%) to 20 (0.6%) years of age.

The highest number of the students questioned was in the 17 yrs. (36.1%) old age group, being followed by 16 (34.1%).

In regard to the level of education 53.1% of students were precollege students and 35.5% of them were studying mathematics. Regarding the level of education of the parents 46% of the mothers had high school certificate while 42.3% of fathers had degrees higher than high school certificate.

In regard to their knowledge of smoking and their attitude towards smoking related problems, the following results were obtained.

Table-1 demonstrated the attitudes of students towards the number of friends of a smoker person, their attractiveness and difficulty of quitting smoking. According to the results of this study there is no significant difference between the cigarette smoking in students and their attitude towards having more friends, attractiveness of a smoker person, and difficulty of quitting smoking. (Table 2, 3, and 4).

According to the results of this research, 316 students (28.2%) (25.2% female and 30.8% male) used to smoke occasionally while 49 students (4.4%) (1.5% female and 6.06% male) used to smoke daily.

Table 1. Frequency distribution of students' attitudes towards friends, attractiveness of a smoker person and difficulty of quitting smoking in Tehran in the year 2003.

Attitude	Number (%)
Attitude towards friends of a smoker person	
Having more friends	218 (20)
Having fewer friends	489 (44.9)
No difference	383 (35.1)
Total	1090 (100)
Attitude towards attractiveness of a smoker person	
More attractive	220 (19.7)
Less attractive	29 (2.6)
No difference	870 (77.7)
Total	1119 (100)
Attitude towards difficulty of quitting smoking	
Very easy	218 (20)
Easy	658 (60.3)
Difficult	173 (15.9)
Very difficult	41 (3.8)
Total	1090 (100)

Table 2. Frequency distribution of students' attitude towards difficulty of quitting smoking according to their cigarette use- Tehran- 2003

	Very easy (%)	Easy (%)	Difficult (%)	Very difficult (%)	Total (%)
Smoker	69(22.1)	184(59)	46(14.7)	13(4.2)	312(100)
Non-smoker	143(19)	459(61)	123(16.4)	27(3.6)	752(100)
Total	212(19.9)	643(60.4)	169(15.9)	40(3.8)	1064(100)

$p = 0.621$

Table 3. Frequency distribution of students' attitude towards the number of friends of a smoker student according to their cigarette use Tehran 2003

	More friends (%)	Fewer friends (%)	No difference (%)	Total (%)
Smoker	69(22.2)	134(42.9)	109(34.9)	312(100)
Non-smoker	143(19)	344(45.8)	265(35.2)	752(100)
Total	212(19.9)	478(44.9)	374(35.2)	1064(100)

P= 0.484

Table 4. Frequency distribution of students' attitude towards attractiveness of a smoker student according to their cigarette use- Tehran 2003

	Less attractive (%)	No difference (%)	Total (%)
Smoker	61(19.6)	251(80.4)	312(100)
Non-smoker	154(20.5)	598(79.5)	752(100)
Total	215(20.2)	849(79.8)	1064(100)

P=0.732

Table 5. Frequency distribution of students' attitude towards prohibition of Tobacco use in public according to their cigarette use.

	In favor	Against	Total
Smoker	245	67	312
	78.5%	21.5%	100%
Non-smoker	613	139	752
	81.5%	18.5%	100%
Total	858	206	1064
	80.6%	19.4%	100%

P=0.261

Table 6. Frequency distribution of students' attitude towards anti-smoking training programs in the previous school year according to their cigarette use.

	Yes	No	Not sure	Total
Smoker	2	155	155	312
	0.6%	49.7%	49.7%	100%
Non-smoker	4	393	355	752
	0.5%	52.3%	47.2%	100%
Total	6	548	510	1064
	0.6%	51.5%	47.9%	100%

P=0.736

Table 7. Frequency distribution of students' attitude towards alerting the society in regard to control smoking according to their cigarette use.

	TV	Group training	Taking advantage of famous individuals	Holding conferences	Total
Smoker	126	96	13	75	310
	40.6%	31%	4.2%	24.2%	100%
Non-smoker	322	205	27	194	748
	43%	27.4%	3.6%	25.9%	100%
Total	448	301	40	269	748
	42.3%	28.4%	3.8%	25.4%	100%

P= 0.629

DISCUSSION

Occasional cigarette smoking in 28.2% of high school students of Tehran must be taken seriously. Presence of 4.4% in the same age group that are daily smokers although is less than those of other countries but should prompt us for starting special training courses to avoid increases. Although, according to the results of this study about 65% of students are not going to smoke in the future, still 35% of students mention the probability of cigarette smoking in the

future. Thus we should take specific preventive programs more seriously in the future.

28.2% of students smoke occasionally. This rate is 25.4% in girls and 30.7% in boys. This difference is not statistically significant ($p>0.05$) and indicates that the risk of starting tobacco use is similar in boys and girls.

More than 80% of students assume that quitting smoking is very easy. This is due to their unawareness about the fact that cigarette smoking results in severe physical and mental dependency and addiction which itself is an important factor in the tendency to smoke. It must be mentioned that there is no significant difference between the cigarette smoking in students and their attitude towards problems of quitting. Also, there is no significant difference between the cigarette smoking in students and having a positive attitude towards having more friends. The majority of both smokers and non smokers believe that smoker students have fewer friends.

The results of this study show that the majority of students believe that smoking does not make them more attractive and most of them believe that the attractiveness of smokers and non smokers are the same.

The prevalence of occasional cigarette smoking in GYTS study (in 1999) that was conducted among the youth of 13 countries was between 10 to 33 percent. This rate was higher in Western countries (9). Our study rate of 28.2% was a medium-high rate in comparison with that of similar countries in our region, being less in girls than boys.

This result is similar to the researches performed in Mediterranean countries. The rate of smoking in women and men of Egypt is 5% (women) and 20% (men), while in Mediterranean countries these rates are 20% (women) and 60% (men) in regard to occasional smoking (10,11). In another research conducted among the precollege students of Tehran

the prevalence of occasional cigarette smoking was 35% in boys and 26.9% in girls. The mean age of starting smoking in boys and girls was 14.36 and 14.29 respectively (12).

In a study performed in Isfahan (from the year 1988 to 1989) among the precollege male students, 22.5% of the students questioned, were smokers and had smoked the first cigarette between the ages of 10 to 13 (13).

According to the National health and disease survey of Iran conducted from the year 1991 to 1999, the prevalence of cigarette smoking in society was 14.6% and 12.5% respectively (14).

There is no significant statistical correlation between cigarette smoking in students and creating a positive attitude in regard to cigarette smoking, a fact which is encouraging. Similarly, there is no significant correlation between smoking abstinence and having negative attitude towards smoking.

The results of this study show that students' attitudes towards smoking are not positive but this does not prevent them from smoking and more serious action should be taken in this regard. Also there is no significant difference between the attitude of smoker and non smoker students towards smoking.

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