

## **DISCUSSION**

Although the study was conducted in only two districts of the country, a general extent of tobacco prevalence among the youth in the country can be drawn from the collected data.

### **PREVALENCE, ACCESS AND CESSATION**

According to the findings of the study, significant proportions of the youth in the country use tobacco products. Nearly 18% of the youth that participated in the survey admitted to have ever smoked cigarettes; but many quitted because of healthy reasons. 5% of the students is currently smoking cigarettes, 17% use any form of tobacco and almost 15% revealed to have used other tobacco products. In both districts and for all categories of smokers, smoking rates among males are significantly higher than in their female counterparts. One other noteworthy feature that emerged from the survey is the higher use of tobacco products by (male) youth in Lilongwe. Unlike Blantyre, Lilongwe is one of the districts where a lot of tobacco is cultivated in the country. High prevalence of tobacco among the youth in the district could therefore be attributed to easier access the young people in Lilongwe have to (raw) tobacco.

The survey results also show that nearly half of the ever smokers reported they started smoking at an early age of 10 and some at the age of less than 10. On the possibility for the non-smokers to initiate smoking by the year 2006, a small proportion (about 0.4%) said they would.

Although a significant proportion of young people use tobacco, the majority of the current smokers who were interviewed knows the harmful effects of tobacco and said they desire to quite smoking but very few of those who tried were successful.

The reasons might be because they (young people) consider smoking as a normal social behavior and tend to correlate smoking with independence and an appearance of confidence, an image that is intensively projected in tobacco advertising and promotional activities, and reinforced by movie/music idols who smoke.

Some young people who are regularly exposed to tobacco messages believe that tobacco provides certain benefits that will help them through adolescence. The risks of tobacco use, which are perceived to be remote, are outweighed by immediate psychological benefits.

### **PUBLIC AWARENESS AND KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE DANGERS OF TOBACCO**

Public awareness programs and activities on the harmful effects of tobacco in Malawi started in the mid1990s when the Consumers Association of Malawi (CAMA); a national non-governmental consumer rights body was established.

CAMA is actively involved in the anti-smoking awareness campaigns for the reduction in the consumption of tobacco in the country and educating communities especially schools children on the dangers of tobacco smoking, in line with the Global fight against tobacco smoking and complementing the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC).

Among the issues that CAMA is addressing in tobacco control includes lobbying the government to legislate tobacco control laws which will include a ban on smoking in public places, ban on tobacco advertising and educating and sensitizing the public on

the dangers associated with tobacco smoking. CAMA has also established a coalition of networks on the fight against tobacco between CAMA secretariat and the public, colleges and schools. The anti-smoking campaign is however, been diluted by contradicting messages from the Government and the tobacco Industry who continue to counter attack the campaigns and supporting the Tobacco industry to continue carrying out smoking advertisements in the media, on billboards, at social events etc portraying "positive" images of using tobacco products; young people are easily influenced by these messages, they are made to believe that smoking is "cool", fun and modern. It is mostly children who reside in urban areas that are more exposed to both types of messages because generally more people have access to televisions, radio, newspapers and magazines. Most billboards are erected and also more sporting events are held in these urban centres.

The anti-smoking campaign in Malawi is also facing an uphill battle mainly due to lack of political will; despite mounting anti-smoking lobby, the government still retains and supports tobacco as the backbone of the country's economy. The government insists that tobacco will remain the country's main export product for many years to come.

## **REGULATIONS TO CONTROL TOBACCO SMOKING IN YOUNG PEOPLE IN MALAWI**

There is no any law in Malawi that explicitly restricts the sale of tobacco products to young people. Youth freely buy cigarettes and other tobacco products from any tobacco retail outlets. The situation has been aggravated by the influx of vendors more especially in urban and peri-urban areas. Since cigarettes are sold loose, there by making access by everyone easy and relatively "cheap" vendors find this as an advantage to sell more tobacco products and operating at any point.

Realizing the vulnerability to exploitation of the consumers in Malawi, CAMA spearheaded the drafting of Consumer Protection Bill<sup>4</sup> that is aimed at curbing the injustices that consumers face on the market. It is hoped that when the bill will be passed, the malpractice of selling harmful products like tobacco to young people would be arrested or reduced and the draft law is also aimed at regulating tobacco advertising.

## **INTERACTIVE COMMUNICATION METHODS**

The survey also tried to explore communication methods which are interactive, other than the media which through its use for disseminating information is good in terms of larger audience it reaches, it is not/less interactive. The findings indicate that the school environment in Malawi makes considerable contribution in providing pupils with messages on the harmful effects of tobacco.

In both districts, over half of the students said they had discussed the effects of smoking tobacco in a classroom. The survey results also show that parents/guardians assist greatly in educating their children on the dangers of smoking. About 80% of never smokers and current smokers in both districts said their families had discussed the negative effects of smoking tobacco.

But, some parents/guardians set a very bad example for their children; nearly 10% of students reported that their parents smoke.

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<sup>4</sup> CAMA has previously been instrumental in the formulation of two important Bills: Consumer Protection and Competition and Fair Trading Bills. After vigorous lobbying the Competition Bill was passed in 1998.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL TOBACCO SMOKE (ETS)**

Most of the homes and places frequented by the youth interviewed do not have anti smoking rules within their premises; almost 1 in every 5 and 1 in every 3 students said they were around others who smoke in their homes and other places (other than their homes) respectively, in a week prior to the interview.

The efforts to protect non-smokers from the health effects of passive smoking are not being supported by the government, that is, at the policy level.

The government parries frequent appeals by CAMA to ban tobacco smoking in public. It (the government) contends that the move would be detrimental to the already ailing economy of the country.

" Government is looking for alternative (main export product) for tobacco, but it cannot just ban tobacco now" said Anthony Livuza, then the Chief Information Officer (Ministry of Information) - reported by *The Nation* on July 2, 2001.

Nonetheless, some few service providers have banned /restrict smoking in or around their premises.<sup>5</sup>

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

- (1) Intensification of education and awareness campaigns especially to the rural areas, where most youth in the country reside and where majority of them are ignorant of the risks associated with the use of tobacco products/ ETS. There is need for full involvement of the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, NGO`s, religious and traditional authorities for the campaigns to be more effective.
- (2) Although considerable levels of tobacco related issues are currently discussed in Schools, comments on the content or intensity of the lessons given cannot be Made. It is therefore, recommended that further research be pursued in this area and that tobacco control must be incorporated in the school curricular. And also, since a significant proportion of the youth start smoking at the age of 10 (or less), there is need for tobacco control education to be introduced at an early age, possibly at school inception and that parents and guardians must involved be in the campaign.
- (3) Lobbying for anti tobacco legislation, which will regulate marketing and distribution of tobacco products and ban tobacco advertisements and tobacco sponsorship to sports. It would be useful to monitor how the tobacco industry adapt its strategies to induce young people into smoking so that appropriate Counteractions should be developed.

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<sup>5</sup> Smoking is for example not allowed in bank halls, supermarkets, public transport (taxis, buses, ferries etc) and at Petroleum Filling Stations.