

Discussions, Conclusions and Recommendations

Tobacco use

The patterns of tobacco use are very different amongst boys and girls in Georgia. Thus, almost double as many boys than girls ever tried to smoke, even if around 50% of both boys and girls started to smoke before 10 years old. Also, almost three times more boys than girls are current cigarettes smokers and use other types of tobacco products. This pattern corresponds to the pattern we have in adults, even if the gap is slightly narrowing.

Considering this, actions could be taken in two directions: a) to decrease or at least to maintain smoking prevalence amongst boys (as at this point is far below the prevalence in male in Georgia - 32.6 %); b) to maintain or even decrease the smoking prevalence amongst girls, that is considerable low comparing to the WHO European average (12.1%).

Another interesting aspect is that it is still the current smokers who use in the same time also other types of tobacco products. This is shown by the fact that the current smoking prevalence for cigarettes is the same with the overall tobacco consumption, in spite of the fact that youngsters do use also other types of tobacco products.

Considering that the percentage of youngsters who use other types of tobacco products is quite low (6.6%), efforts should be made to that it does not increase. In this direction, legislative measures should be taken to prohibit the selling of this type of tobacco products and any other measures that proved to be efficient in countries having experience in this area of tobacco control.

School education

Tobacco control education did not develop yet much in Georgia. From all students surveyed, only 10% have classes on tobacco control, even in Tbilisi the percentage is higher (about 18%) than in other cities and rural areas.

In these circumstances, it is necessary that to introduce in the school curricula more classes on health education that tackle tobacco. But since we are anyway it is a good opportunity that we develop school programs that proved to be efficient in countries with long-term tradition in this area (like UK, of Finland, etc.).

Knowledge and attitudes

The impact of the smoker image (that has more friends, is more attractive, etc.) promoted by tobacco industry is not so popular amongst young Georgians. Only around 15 % of them think that smoking makes you have more friends and around 20 % think that smokers look more attractive. Public health professionals can speculate this opportunity, if they are supported by a legislation that bans advertising at this stage.

Cessation

The survey showed that more than 40% of youngsters expressed their desire to stop smoking and even more of them (49%) tried to stop smoking during the year of the survey. The fact that more than 80% of the current smokers say that they could stop smoking if they wanted, supported by the fact that only 2.3% of them showed to be

addicted to tobacco, constitutes a positive factor that needs to be exploited, since it was not until now. It is interesting to mention as well that a high percentage of youngsters were encouraged to stop smoking by receiving advice or help, but most of them from their family (72.8%) or friends (23.7%), very few from health professionals (3.5%). That is why professional cessation programs need to be developed more in the future, as an essential tool for Georgia to decrease smoking prevalence amongst youngsters.

Environmental Tobacco Smoke

The results of the GYTS show that all Georgian youngsters (both boys and girls, both current smokers and never smokers) are highly exposed (more than 90 % of them) to ETS both in public places and in their homes (both by family members and by other persons).

Currently, there are almost no restrictions on smoking in public places in Georgia. But more than 75% of youngsters are in favour of banning smoking in public places, with more never smokers than current smokers supporting this ban. Therefore, the recent initiative of the Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Affairs to promote a new tobacco law, containing provisions on ETS could be an adequate response to this situation. The necessity of such a law is strongly supported by the results of this survey.

Current smokers are even more exposed than never smokers at home. The highest exposure at home comes from their fathers and from other persons, as almost 75 % of youngsters are exposed by fathers and more than 80% of them by other persons. A significant aspect is that current smokers were exposed to ETS at home four times more by their brothers and five times more by their best friends than never smokers. The passive smoking at home seems to be a critical factor for youngsters in becoming current smokers.

It is therefore necessary to develop programs that address passive smoking at home, targeting each of the categories that expose young people to ETS, as mentioned above. These programs should take into consideration the fact that only one third of current smokers in comparison with never smokers think that smoking from others is harmful for their health.

Media and Advertising

The pro tobacco messages are significantly more advertised than the anti-tobacco messages on almost all forms of advertising. There are twice as many pro tobacco advertisements than anti tobacco advertisements in billboards, newspapers and magazines and at sports events, fairs, concerts or community events. It is therefore important to increase the number of anti tobacco advertising. Still, more than 50% of youngsters have seen or heard anti tobacco advertising in one or another form of advertising. This shows that not only the number of advertisements launched is important, but also their quality. In the same time, since there is no comprehensive ban on tobacco advertising in Georgia, this gives a good opportunity, but an unfair one from the public health point of view, to tobacco industry to promote tobacco use. Their actions have proved their efficiency, considering the high prevalence in tobacco use in youngsters. Adopting legislative measures that would include a comprehensive

ban on all forms of tobacco advertising will constitute an efficient way of preventing the spread of tobacco use amongst young people. In the same time, more substantial investment, financial and media-wise professional from the government into anti-tobacco advertising could also contribute to counterbalancing the effect of the pro-tobacco advertising.

Indirect advertising is also speculated by the tobacco industry, as 40 of current smokers have an object with a cigarette brand logo on it. In the same time only half as many never smokers declared they have such an object. The percentage of youngsters who have been offered free cigarettes is relatively low, around 10% in Georgia in general, but significantly more in Tbilisi. Since at present there is no legislation to restrict any of these forms of indirect advertising, it is important to include in the new project of law a ban on both of them as soon as possible, so that they do not expend more.

Access and Availability

More than 50% of current smokers were able to purchase cigarettes in stores, and almost 100% of those who bought were not refused because of their age. This is in spite of the fact that tobacco products selling to minors (under 18 years old) is prohibited in Georgia. In this case, even if the law exists, it is not enforced appropriately and there are no efficient measures in the present law to control the enforcement.

Contributors

Dr. Ramaz Urushadze was the National Coordinator. Dr. Akaki Gamkrelidze was the scientific and financial director of the survey. The OSH/CDC designed the study. Dr. Akaki Khuskivadze, Dr. Nino Chanturidze, Dr. Theodore Gobejishvili supervised the data collection. Dr. Nana Nikolaishvili, Dr. Charles W. Warren, Ms. Joliette Lee, Ms. Veronica Lea, Ms. Ionela Petrea contributed to the data analysis and interpretation of the data. Dr. Nana Nikolaishvili wrote the report with contributions from Dr. Charles W. Warren, Dr. Akaki Gamkrelidze

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