

## **Discussion**

### *Prevalence*

More than half of 13-15 year old Serbian teenagers attending school have already smoked cigarettes and almost one-third of them had their first cigarette before the age of 10 years. Almost one-sixth of current smokers reported a desire to always have a cigarette first thing in the morning and one-fifth of never smokers stated that they were likely to initiate smoking during the next year. This shows that there is a high risk of addiction. These results indicate a high potential for tobacco use in later life and a potentially high prevalence of tobacco-related diseases (1, 3, 5).

Manufactured cigarettes are the most common item smoked in all regions. Less than ten percent of current smoker students use other forms of tobacco. The girls use a pipe very rarely.

The high prevalence of tobacco use among young people requires urgent intervention. The main assignment is to reduce smoking prevalence working on vulnerable population and impact to the habits, knowledge and attitudes, and neutralize and change behaviour risks. Peer education, media advocacy and partnerships are the most needed strategies for effective programs of health promotion and public health within the community (19, 22).

### *Cessation*

More than one half of current smokers want to quit and more than three-fourths of them tried to stop smoking this year. But the majority failed. Two-thirds of current smokers received help to quit smoking. Young current smokers are not informed on where and how they can get help advice for stopping. These indicators are on the same level in Belgrade, rural and urban area. There is an opportunity for cessation program activity in the schools, in local community, in sports association and in health care facilities. The comprehensive guide emphasizes that effective treatment for youth tobacco cessation involves more than simply providing the right treatment components (23).

### *School Curriculum*

Less than two-thirds of students had a class where they were taught the danger of smoking. Only two-fifths of students discussed reasons why people their age smoke and half of them were taught about of harmful effects of smoking.

This would seem to indicate that something is wrong with school curriculum. It is necessary that the format and content of the school curriculum be contemporary and based on evidence, and focused on the needs of youth. Youth-friendly communications strategies and approaches should be put into action. School-based smoking prevention and tobacco control should be integrated into several school subjects.

### *Environmental Tobacco Smoke (ETS)*

Young people are very much exposed to tobacco smoke. The results of the 2003 Serbia GYTS show that an extremely high percentage of students (current and never smokers) is exposed to tobacco smoke both at home and in public places. Never smokers are less exposed to smoke from brothers, sisters and friends. There is big difference between current smokers and never smokers about thinking that smoking should be banned from public places and that tobacco smoke from others is harmful to them.

### *Knowledge and attitudes*

For students, smoking is mainly a social activity, a way of making contact with peers especially of the opposite sex. There is no difference between boys and girls, either current or never smokers about making social contacts, but current smokers, boys and girls, think smoking makes them more attractive. They often concentrate on the short-term benefits of tobacco use, ignoring its harmful effects.

### *Media and Advertising*

Students are affected by advertising and other media messages. The mass media has a responsibility in monitoring pro-tobacco use and anti-tobacco messages in advertisements. The survey results show that students are exposed more frequently to pro-smoking than to anti-smoking messages. In Serbia, there is no difference by gender and regions in anti-smoking and pro-smoking messages on TV, newspapers and magazines and sports events, fairs, concerts or community events. There is a difference in exposure to pro-tobacco message on billboards in Belgrade than in other regions (some of the respondents in the rural areas did not know what a billboard is as they had never seen one).

Significantly more current smokers than never smokers had an object with a cigarette brand logo on it, and more current smokers than never smokers had been offered free cigarettes by a tobacco company representative.

Laws and regulations about the advertising of tobacco products in the Republic of Serbia exist; however, they have to be applied and enforced. The primary conclusion is that a comprehensive ban on tobacco advertising and promotion is required; a partial ban has little or no effect (24). It has been estimated that every 10% increase in media anti-smoking campaign expenditures reduces cigarette sales by 0.5% (25).

### *Access and Availability*

The majority of current smokers purchase their cigarettes in a store; over nine in ten current smokers who bought cigarettes in a store were not refused because of their age. One-fifth of them smoke at home. It is necessary to respect the law and ban the sale of cigarettes to persons under age, and perhaps to lower the age to 15 years from 18 years. Parents also have to be educated about the harmful effects of tobacco; so that they can help their children quit smoking.