

## **Executive summary**

*Objectives:* This study aims to provide nationally representative data on the smoking prevalence of Hungarian young people. Furthermore it reveals adolescents' knowledge and attitude related to tobacco use, their exposure to media messages on smoking and to environmental tobacco smoke (ETS), the access and availability of tobacco products for minors and the presence of health education on tobacco smoking in the school practice.

*Subjects and Methods:* A school-based nationally and regionally representative survey was administered using two stage cluster sampling method. Thus data of 4484 students aged mainly between 13 and 15 years were used. Data collection was carried out by the use of internationally standardised questionnaire. This survey was conducted within the frame of Global Youth Tobacco Survey (GYTS).

*Results:* More than two-third of students have already experimented with smoking and one-third of them have remained current smokers. There are no significant gender differences in the prevalence data. Every fifth never smokers are susceptible to initiate smoking and this proportion is much higher in the girls (27.9%) than in the boys (15.0). More than one-third of current smokers intend to quit. More than half of the students were not taught about the effects of tobacco use in the school in the last year. High percentage of both never and current smokers are exposed regularly to ETS. About 30-60% of young people have met anti-smoking media messages, whilst about 60-85% of them have met pro-smoking media messages. Considerable percentages of both never and current smokers have positive attitude toward tobacco use. More than three-third of current smokers have never had problem because of their age in buying cigarette.

*Conclusions and Recommendations:* There is an urgent need to reduce smoking prevalences among young people. To achieve this we have a lot to do: to develop effective tobacco control prevention and cessation programs especially for youth, to disseminate existing good programs expansively, to give more information on tobacco use not only for students but also for their environment (e.g. for the family). There is a need for more effective legislation.

## **Introduction**

It is a worldwide known fact that tobacco use causes serious health problems. Nowadays every tenth death among adults is attributable to tobacco use in the world (1). The European Region of WHO, with only 15% of the world's population, faces nearly one third of the worldwide burden of tobacco-correlated diseases. At the end of the 1990s tobacco products were responsible for 1.2 million deaths (14% of all deaths), and unless more effective measures are implemented it is estimated that they will cause 2 million deaths (20% of all deaths) each year by 2020. While it has fallen from 45% to 30% over the past 30 years and has currently stabilized, smoking prevalence in the European Region still remains at a level that is devastating for public health and future generations. The negative trends in smoking prevalence among young people, women and lower socioeconomic groups, as well as the gap in tobacco control policies between Member States, are of a particular concern. A lack of political will and sustainability in tobacco control policies is still characteristic of a large part of the Region (2).

## **Health Effects**

Scientific researches have proved undoubtedly that tobacco use has causal role in the developing of several fatal diseases (3). Tobacco use is responsible for the half of malignant tumours – within this for the 90% of lung cancers – (4), for the 80% of chronic bronchitis-emphysemas (it also exacerbates asthmatic symptoms), for more than half of cardio-vascular diseases (e.g. heart attack, arteriosclerosis) and cerebral vascular diseases (5, 6).

Smoking has unfavourable impact on sexual functioning as well. Decrease of the number of spermiums and damaged viability of the rest (and consequently declined fertility) are detectable in young males (7). Vascular lesions can cause potency disturbance. Embedding of fertilized ovum is embarrassed and respectively the rejection of embedded zygote (early spontaneous abortion) is more frequent in smoking females. All of these follow that tobacco use is responsible for infertility of many females and for many unions of barren issue (8).

Underdevelopment of the foetus caused by the decay of blood circulation in the uterus and the placenta and the low oxygen level of blood is observable in smoking gravidas.

As a consequence it increases the risk for premature birth and/or disability of newborn. Tobacco use during pregnancy also can cause preterm deliveries, low birth weight, and developmental anomalies such as lack of extremities (9).

The harmful effect of environmental smoke (the passive smoking) is also well-known (10, 11). However, early harmful effects of tobacco use (in which young people are concerned too) are less known (12). The efficacy of heart declines following smoking only for few months.

## **Tobacco use in Hungary**

In Hungary one of the most socially accepted health-damaging behaviour is tobacco use, mainly cigarette smoking. This was a big problem in the last decades and in addition it is increasing nowadays. Prevalence of daily smokers is 38,2% among adult males, but it is also high among females: almost every fourth adult woman is a daily smoker (23%) (13). Comparing to the European average prevalence (and to the most countries of this region) these data are extremely high (1). This extensive tobacco use has considerable and serious health outcomes. In Hungary 140 000 people die in each year and 28 000 of them die because of diseases caused by tobacco use (14). Thus smoking has a crucial role in the decrease of Hungarian population, which is considered with reason a national catastrophe.

Another very serious issue is that smoking is usual among young people, too. Moreover they start smoking in younger and younger age (15, 16), which is a world-wide phenomenon (17). Some nationally representative studies showed that in the last years about three-fourth of 15-17 year-old young people reported that they already had tried smoking (18, 19) and almost one-third (32,7%) of them are at least weekly smokers (19). Though prevalences of boys are a little bit higher than those of girls, these differences are small (less than 5%).