

and advertisement on billboards and posters increases with grade and age. More girls than boys have ever gone to a concert sponsored by a cigarette brand at least once (23.5% and 18.6% respectively) and similar situation exists in relation to having possessions, like t-shirts, pens, etc., with a cigarette brand logo on it (15% and 11.2% respectively).

#### *Environmental tobacco use*

One third of students lived in a home where others smoked, and one in five students reported been in the presence of someone else who smoke at home three or more days during the past seven days. It is a matter of concern that one third of boys and girls have been exposed to people's smoking in places other than their home. The percentage of exposure increases with age and grade not only at home but in other places.

#### *School curriculum*

Nearly four in ten students reported having been taught in school about the dangers of cigarette smoking and this experiences decreases with grade and age. Over one third of all girls and boys have indicated two main aspects taught by teachers in relation with the dangers of tobacco smoking: the reasons why people their age smoke and some specific effects of smoking tobacco, like makes the teeth yellow, causes wrinkles, etc.

#### Conclusions

Youth cigarette use in Costa Rica is very high. The study reveal the highest prevalence percentages found in one decade which is of concern considering that three out of five young people who experiment with cigarettes will become dependent.

A recent research report<sup>4</sup> have mentioned that in most countries boys are more likely than girls to use tobacco. In Costa Rica data indicates no differences according to gender. This is an extremely point of concern which requires more research and shows the success of the tobacco industry in making smoking fashionable for a sensitive target, such as women. It is well known that adolescents are particular susceptible to cigarette advertising<sup>5</sup>.

Despite recent tobacco control and regulatory legislation, costarican youngsters are highly expose to aggressive cigarette advertisement. Promoting the banning of tobacco advertisement should be one of the main national efforts, as well as providing more developed and widespread disseminated anti-tobacco messages.

The fact that only a little bit more than one third of the students have been taught in school about dangers of smoking, suggests the need for a more active and determinant role of the formal educational system, especially in affecting the higher grades in school, as this research point out. Interestingly, this is consistent with the life skills programs developed in Costa Rica since 1999 which focuses on 7<sup>th</sup> grade students.

However, there are some positive aspects that must be commented. Data from the survey shows that exposure of young people to environmental tobacco smoking is high, but they are, on the other hand, expressing their desire to stay away from that exposure. The majority of the students would no accept a cigarette offered from a friend, and actually

think that smoking is harmful to their health as well as a second hand smoke. Most of them think that a smoker around non-smokers should ask permission, and in those who smoke, health improving is one of the main reason to stop smoking.

One aspect of interest, and closely related with specific intervention possibilities, is the fact that most of current smokers desire to stop. This could lead actions coordinated by IAFA and the Ministry of Education in the whole educational system as part of the life skills training programs which began in 1999 with 7<sup>th</sup> grade students and will cover 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> graders in 2001 and 2002.