

Table 1
Sociodemographic characteristics of 7th, 8th and 9th graders
Costa Rica, 1999

Variable	Frequency	Weighted percent
SEX		
Male	2472	48.1
Female	2126	51.9
Missing	25	
AGE		
11 years	15	0.4
12 years	158	3.8
13 years	1198	28.8
14 years	1412	29.2
15 years	1229	25.4
16 years	423	9.0
17 years	160	3.5
Missing	28	
GRADE		
7 th year	1898	47.8
8 th year	1567	29.0
9 th year	1138	23.2
Missing	20	

Results

Prevalence

Students who had ever smoked cigarettes represent a 46.4% of the sample. Interestingly this percentage prevalence is higher than the one found in the general population four years earlier¹ and higher if compared with other studies in costarican youth².

As showed in (Table 2), girls were more likely than boys to have ever smoked cigarettes, being a current smoker and even a frequent current smoker. Although, differences are not statistically significant. Non published studies in Costa Rica have revealed similar tendencies in middle

schools students. This is a matter of especial concern because the transformations observed in this pattern is being showing up in only few years. Table 2 also shows some aspects of interest: ever smoking increases with grade and age, current smoking significantly increases with age, over one third of 16+ year olds are current smokers, which is considered very high, and 8,4% of youth age 12 are current smokers, which reveals very high early smoking. The fact that 10.5% of 16+ year olds are current frequent smokers seems to indicate dependence in this group.

Current cigarette smoking (i.e. had smoked one or more days during the 30 days preceding the survey) and current frequent smoking (i.e. had smoked cigarettes on 20 or more days of the past 30 days) increases with student's grade and age.

Table 2
Weighed percents and confidence intervals of students who use tobacco, according to sex, grade and age.
Costa Rica, 1999

VARIABLE	EVER SMOKER	95% CI	CURRENT SMOKER	95% CI	CURRENT FREQUENT SMOKER	95% CI
SEX						
Male	44.1	3.5	19.1	2.9	2.5	1.1
Female	48.6	3.5	20.0	2.8	4.0	2.1
GRADE						
7 th	40.5	3.7	17.3	2.9	2.2	1.0
8 th	48.7	4.4	20.1	3.8	3.2	1.7
9 th	55.4	5.5	23.7	3.8	5.4	2.8
AGE						
12	27.6	6.5	8.4	4.0	0	0
13	32.7	4.3	11.8	2.5	0.7	0.6
14	46.5	3.6	19.4	2.2	2.7	1.6
15	55.4	4.1	22.9	3.4	3.8	1.9
16+	65.7	4.5	35.1	4.9	10.5	3.8

On the other hand, the percentage of students who consider themselves daily smokers was 5.4% (4.9% boys and 5.6% girls) and this opinion increases with grade and age.

Age of onset

10.4% of ever smokers smoked cigarettes before age 10. Girls were more likely than boys to initiate smoking before 10 years of age (13% and 7.2% respectively).

Minor's Access

Current smokers were asked where they usually smoke. Both girls and boys who smoked did it when they were in the company of friends

(53%), and possibly within social events context (i.e. parties, social meetings). Few used to smoke at home or at school.

For over one third of current smokers, the most likely means of accessing tobacco cigarettes was to purchase them in a store, followed by those who borrowed them from someone else (29%). From those who try to buy cigarettes during the past 30 days, two thirds were not rejected when purchasing because they were under age. Also, the percentage of all students that knew places that sell single or loose cigarettes was very high (84.4%).

Smoking Cessation

Over two thirds of current smokers strongly indicated that they wanted to stop smoking now, and 71% indicates that in the past year they try to quit smoking. The desire of quitting smoking increases with grade and especially with age and was similar for girls and boys. This situation has happened in most of the countries where GYTS has been administered³. Nearly 19% of smokers have unsuccessfully tried to stop smoking four or more times and nearly one half have tried it 1 to 3 times.

Media and advertising

A quarter of both girls and boys had not seen anti-smoking media messages during the 30 days preceding the survey, and one third indicates they have seen a lot of this messages. On the other hand, 50% of the students saw actors smoking while watching TV, videos or movies and nearly one half hear about cigarette brand names while listening to the radio. Exposure to heavy cigarette promotion on TV, videos and movies,

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.