

School Curriculum

Table 7: Percentage Taught Dangers of Smoking At School

Category	Percent taught dangers of smoking	Percent discussed reasons why people their age smoke
	% CI	% CI
Total	58.3 ±4.7	42.4 ±4.4
Sex		
Male	53.3 ±6.2	37.6 ±5.4
Female	63.7 ±5.0	46.9 ±5.3
Form		
One	62.9 ±8.7	42.7 ±9.1
Two	53.3 ±8.8	40.7 ±8.1
Three	60.8 ±8.7	49.7 ±8.1
Four	54.5 ±11.6	32.4 ±9.0

Health and Family Life Education has been a component of the primary school curriculum for many years. However, this component is only now being officially implemented in the secondary schools. Nevertheless, sporadic sessions on drug prevention through the Drug Awareness Resistance Education (DARE) programme have been conducted at the secondary schools.

Students' exposure to education sessions on tobacco smoking was higher for the respondents from the primary schools. Over half (58.3%) of the respondents were taught the dangers of smoking and (42.4%) of them had discussed why students their age smoked. 43.43% did not discuss that topic. 54.44% were taught the effects of smoking.

Discussion

The Dominica GYTS provided data on prevalence of cigarette and other tobacco use as well as information on five determinants of tobacco use. These include: access in terms of price and availability; environmental tobacco smoke exposure; cessation; media awareness and advertisement and school curriculum.

Analysis of data has revealed valuable information that could:

- Give guidelines for a comprehensive school and community based intervention programme.
- Inform policy makers of the true tobacco picture among youth who are at school and the need to make every effort to provide the necessary political will and resources to address the situation in order to deter the use of tobacco among youth.
- Inform parents/guardians of the tobacco use among their children and the way their smoking habits influence the children's tobacco habits and attitude.

- Allow students to recognize their situation and to consider their practice and its long-term effects on their health.
- Enable teachers to recognize the need to more forcefully use the anti-tobacco curriculum
- Enable media workers to recognize the negative influence they facilitate by creating a glamorous picture of tobacco smoking.

Prevalence

Tobacco use among the surveyed youth is quite high. Over one-third of the students (37.1%) had ever smoked cigarettes. A total of 11.6% of these are currently using other tobacco products. Further research will be required to be sure what the young persons are smoking.

While 63.8% of the respondents indicated they had never smoked cigarettes, those who had ever smoked one or two puffs started doing so as early as age 10 years. This age group seems to be indicating that this is the most vulnerable age group for the youth. Past surveys conducted by Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) on adolescent health indicated that sexual activity started as early as 10 years. These two indicators are significant for programme assessment and intervention. Adequate attention is not given to the social issues that affect the youth at that early age. Due to modernization and social needs, young children are usually left as the responsibility of other siblings who themselves need guardians and are not capable to provide the level of supervision that is required by younger siblings. Adults usually do not understand that children do not think like adults and most times underestimate the care and supervision children that age group require to help them take less risks. In the advent of modernization, behaviors that were considered wrong for children to practice have become a matter of choice.

Smoking has become a regular activity particularly among certain cultural and religious groups. This may create a false picture to the younger ones indicating it is all right to smoke.

The frequency of smoking amongst the respondents was also alarming. The majority of them smoke between 2 to 5 cigarettes a day, with just under 1% smoking 20 cigarettes daily. When one considers the fatality of cigarette smoking both to the smoker and the non-smoker, our youth are exposed to the risk of developing serious health related conditions in the early years of life.

Studies also show that the younger a person is when they are exposed to smoking, the greater their chances are of contracting cancer in life. Given the above prevalence among the under 12 to 16 plus youth, there is a risk of them developing not only lung cancer but heart disease, strokes and other respiratory diseases before their 35th year of life.

Knowledge and Attitudes About People Who Smoke

In Dominica, knowledge on the dangers of tobacco smoking among youth is quite high. About 77% of the respondents have been exposed to information at school and other information dissemination formats. However, at least half of them have been exposed to negative information.

It is important to note that while 33.4% of current smokers think that boys who smoke have more friends, 78.3% of the total respondents think that smoking makes girls look more attractive. A little over eighty percent (81.6%) of that number were females. This information indicates that girls who were not smoking during the time the survey was administered are at risk of becoming smokers because of the glamorous image they perceived female smokers have.

This has great implications for the need to reinforce correct messages on the effects of tobacco in forms that will counteract the glamorous images that are projected by the print and electronic media.

These images are projected through advertisements from the print and electronic media channels. Efforts that are made and channels that are used to disseminate anti-smoking messages to the youth are not as attractive and impressive as those that are used to portray the negative messages. Several factors influence the situation. Because of this, it has implications for several interventions to be initiated at various levels of society. As the discussion continues, they will be mentioned under the legitimate sections. For this section, reference is made for the need for improvement of message content, channel used to disseminate information, legislation for sale, advertisement and public place restriction.

The survey explored other communication methods that are used to disseminate information on tobacco use. Students were asked whether they were taught about tobacco, the effect of smoking and reasons why young people their age smoked. More than half of the respondents were taught the dangers of smoking and 42.4% of them discussed reasons why people their age smoked. Again the percentage, which expressed the fact that they were taught about the dangers of smoking in school, was much less than those who are exposed to anti-smoking messages heard on the media. This indicates that although the school curriculum contains components of Life Skills For Drugs Abuse Prevention, the section on Tobacco Harmful Effects are under utilized. Measures should be made to use the channels that are readily available at schools for a wider dissemination of information. Where there is no programme, every effort should be made to implement this topic through the school-based Health and Family Life Education Programme.

Coupled with this poor information dissemination is the easy access that students have to obtain objects with cigarette brand logos on them and the availability of free cigarettes from tobacco companies.

It was also observed that the level of discussion students have with their parents about tobacco use and the effects was very high, 65.9% However, exposure to information on tobacco effects differs at various other levels. There is need to purposely assess the

information dissemination status with every intent to make improvements for more effective results.

It is encouraging to note that 67% of the students who responded to the survey indicated that none of their parents smoked.

It was also recognized that there are some areas in tobacco prevention that are beyond the control of the programme implementers. Reference is made to the percentage of students who identifies with cigarette brand logos and the difficulty with which they source their supply. Several students have family members who live out of state who usually supply them with clothing. When these items are received the students may not have control over whether they wear it or not. This situation provides opportunities for more parent and guardian involvement in the intervention programme. This would not only provide information for management of student's tobacco behaviour but it would create greater awareness for parents to learn of the dangers for themselves and to apply or use the information to make adjustments in their smoking habits.

Access and Availability

According to data collected, there seemed to be easy access to obtain cigarettes and other tobacco products.

Seventy percent (70.9%) of the present current smokers indicated that their age did not prevent them from purchasing cigarettes. There could be several reasons for this:

- Lack of legislation and control for purchasing cigarettes or tobacco products largely contributes to the situation.
- Secondly adults from an early age use children to purchase tobacco products. Purchases by youth are quite common within the Dominican society.
- Thirdly, the percentage of current smokers who smoke at home was very high, particularly among the female students, 28.5%. The availability and having to purchase for adults could be a contributing factor.

This situation requires the implementation of regulations regarding the age of purchase for students. Measures such as penalties for shopkeepers who do not adhere to the legislation should be instituted to ensure strict control.

Environmental Tobacco Smoke

The data revealed that exposure to environmental tobacco smoke by non-smokers at home was much lower than exposure at public places. Exposure from others in public places was quite high by non-smokers. A little over half, 51.6% of them are exposed to environmental tobacco smoke.

It was also observed that current smokers' exposure was high both at home and in public places. It could be that they are exposed to their own smoke.

This means that there are significant differences between current smokers and non-smokers. There is also high exposure by current smokers. These are maybe the reasons why never smokers desire a ban on smoking in public places.

The effort that is made by public service providers to ban smoking at their business places should be commended and strengthened by cessation legislation.

One of the questions asked was whether smoking should be banned from public places. 73.1% of never-smokers responded that smoking should be banned. Eighty percent (80%) of these respondents were females. For the question on harmful effects of cigarette smoke to non-smokers, 76% never-smokers indicated that smoke from others is definitely harmful to them. The current smokers, which are 13% of the respondents, indicated smoke from others is definitely harmful to them. 8.3% of the current smokers said they wanted to stop smoking at the time of the survey, 17.69% of those who ever smoked said they were not smoking at the time of the survey. Almost 10% of those who ever smoked were not smoking for at least 2 years when the survey was conducted. Their main reasons for stopping were to improve their health, family members objected to it and their friends don't like it.

These responses show that the condition is right for a tobacco cessation programme. Before the study was conducted, the general population consensus was that cigarette smoking is not a problem in Dominica. Without current studies, that assumption seemed true, but with information that is gathered from this data the assumption is proven wrong. Truly, evidence is needed for any effective intervention or prevention programme to be developed.

Considering the wide cross section of the society that the survey covered, smoking habits or behaviours are well recorded among that particular target group. Therefore, programs can be developed for the concerned groups, for students who are in lower grades as well as those who are out of school and those who are in the various communities can also benefit greatly.

IN CONCLUSION

It must be reiterated that, tobacco use among the surveyed youth is quite high. **Over one-third of the students ever smoked cigarettes, most initiated smoking before age 10, and 13% were current cigarette smokers.** This evidence is adequate to cause concern among policy makers, programme implementers, parents, guardians and young people themselves.

It is frequently said that young people experiment with new and risky behaviours. They do not always consider long-term effect or consequences of such behaviours. The glamorous picture that is created by advertising companies usually cause them to underestimate the addictiveness of nicotine and the difficulties associated with quitting, nor the harmful effects that are related to smoking and exposure to tobacco smoke.