

DISCUSSION

Prevalence

Tobacco use among youths is decreasing in the developed countries due to increased pressure against big tobacco companies. However it is increasing in developing countries with deadly results. In order therefore to prepare for any increased attack by tobacco companies to entice more persons into using tobacco, one should know the current situation. One of the goals of this survey was to find out not only the number of persons who have tried at least one puff of cigarette in the past but also how many current smokers there are, and among those, the number who are addicted. To the question “Have you ever smoked cigarettes in the past even if it was only one or two puffs?” 34.4% males and 20.9% females indicated that they have. In determining current usage (which is defined as having smoked in the last 30 days) an affirmative response was reduced by about 2/3. Thus there seems to be a fair amount of experimentation with cigarettes. However boys are definitely more likely to try smoking than girls. The degree of experimentation increases with grade or form. Current use of other tobacco products (11%) is slightly greater than that of smoking cigarettes (9%). Further studies may be needed to elucidate the other tobacco products that are being used. Table 3a shows that one of the other types of tobacco used is hemp. Among those who use hemp there is also a significant difference between the number of males and females. The proportion of frequent smokers is very small (0.4 and 0.6% for males and females respectively). However the problem should not be ignored because eleven percent of those who never smoked seem to be susceptible to do so in the future. It should also be noted that one third of students were exposed to cigarettes before age 10. Early initiation could result in longer exposure and possible greater number and severity of complications.

Access

Most students who smoke do so at home (Table 4). Also current smokers are more likely to do so when drinking alcohol or using another drug. A friend’s house is also a usual place to smoke. At social events and at school are among the least popular places or times to smoke.

Only 18% said that they bought their cigarettes from a store. Cigarettes are sold everywhere, by the packets in supermarkets or large shops and by the packets or singles in small shops and from individuals. Whereas 58% said that they were not refused because of their age, there are no laws prohibiting the sale of cigarettes to anyone. In fact parents and other adults usually send children to purchase their cigarettes or tobacco.

Knowledge and Attitudes

A similar percentage (28%) of both nonsmokers and current smokers think that boys who smoke have more friends. The proportion of those who think that girls who smoke have more friends is also similar for smokers and nonsmokers (18.5 and 17.7 respectively). While there is no difference of opinion between smokers and nonsmokers regarding the number of friends that boys or girls who smoke have, it should be noted that more persons think that boys who smoke have more friends than girls who smoke. This may indicate that it is more culturally acceptable for boys to smoke than for girls.

With regards to the notion that smoking makes boys or girls more attractive, there is a significant difference of opinion between the smokers and the nonsmokers. This notion is more popular among current smokers than those who don't smoke. The difference is more pronounced regarding boys.

Attitude towards quitting

Although the proportion of students who smoke is not very large, it should be noted, however, that 72% would like to stop smoking. In fact 70% have tried to stop. Those responsible for tobacco control in schools should pay attention to this fact and should consider a cessation program for students.

Environmental Tobacco Smoke

Exposure to tobacco smoke at home may be an important influencing factor in determining initiation of smoking among students. Sixty percent of current smokers are exposed to tobacco smoke at home while only 23% of never smokers are exposed at home (Table 8). There is therefore a significant difference between never smokers and current smokers regarding the

proportion of persons exposed at home. There is however increased exposure in public places when compared to that at home. It is noticed that twice as many never smokers are exposed in public places when compared to the home 48.4% and 23.2% respectively. More current smokers are exposed in public places also.

In Table 9 both never smoker and current smokers think that smoking is harmful to health and should be banned from public places. There is still a significant difference in the strength of their opinions with never smokers being more forceful in both cases. Some may express the view that their bodies belong to them and they can do what they please with regards to their bodies. However they should also realize that their freedom should not violate someone else right to breathe clean air that is not contaminated by tobacco smoke.

Media and advertising

Media and advertising plays an important role in influencing behaviour in general. Although a large proportion of students are exposed to anti-tobacco messages exposure to pro-tobacco influence is still relatively high. It is difficult to control pro-tobacco messages in newspapers and magazines that are brought into the country, however anti-tobacco media messages although fairly high can be increased further.

School Curriculum

Since smoking initiation generally occurs before 18 years every effort must be made to ensure that everyone is aware of the dangers of smoking. The classroom seems to be a very good place to impart such information. The survey shows that only half of the students are taught the dangers of tobacco use.

Limitations

The student response rate especially for the primary schools was lower than expected. This was due partly to the existing situation when the survey was conducted. Industrial unrest among teachers led to the discontinuation of classes for some time resulting in the conduction of the survey during end of term examination. We therefore had to fit into the already planned exam schedule. Absenteeism was high. Students who did not have exams on a particular day or time

were absent and therefore did not participate in the survey. Survey administrators, being full time employees, could not always easily fit into the available schedule. The classroom setting allowed some degree of communication among students. Not all questions were answered in some cases. Unknown sex and or age represented 9.2% of participants. The number of current smokers was relatively small resulting in the analysis not always being sufficiently powerful.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Twenty-eight percent of students have experimented with cigarettes. Of the 16% who currently uses some form of tobacco, 9% smoke cigarettes while 11% use other tobacco products. Presently tobacco products are easily accessible. They are sold in shops and supermarkets and even singly anywhere in the country. There are no laws preventing children from purchasing tobacco products. In fact, parents sometime send their children to purchase tobacco products for them. Therefore, as an initial step, laws should be put in place to prevent easy access of tobacco products to children by restricting the sale of tobacco to specific tobacco shops with a license. Also children should be prevented from purchasing tobacco products or from even going into places licensed to sell tobacco products.

Although not a very large proportion, some students think that someone who smokes looks more attractive and definitely has more friends. Since 11% of those who never smoked are likely to do so within the next year, health personnel and anti-tobacco activists should employ strategies to counter this perception and so reduce the number of persons who would be tempted to experiment with cigarettes.

Environmental tobacco smoke (ETS) exposure is relatively high. Thirty percent of respondents have at least one parent who smokes and are therefore exposed to ETS at home. More than 50% are exposed to ETS in public places. Cabinet has given the Ministry of Health the authority to put up no smoking signs at government buildings, but there are currently no laws prohibiting smoking in public places. Seventy percent of students think that exposure to ETS is harmful to their health and that smoking should be banned from public places. Legislation is definitely needed to prevent non-smokers from being exposed to the cancerous and irritating chemicals found in cigarette smoke.