

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **BACKGROUND:**

This report comments on data collected for the Barbados component of the Global Youth Tobacco Survey (GYTS) and is intended to establish the extent to which children in schools smoke and if so, whether this is experimental or habitual and if there have been any changes since 1999 when the last survey was conducted. Additionally the study collects data on issues related to smoking such as the use of alcohol, illegal drugs and also looks at community and sporting involvement and sexual activity.

### **METHODOLOGY:**

The survey employed a two-stage cluster sample of 19 Secondary Schools in Barbados. In total some 1,931 students were given self-administered questionnaires and the survey achieved a student response rate of 86% or 1,654 students which can be considered representative of the population although the response rate achieved in 1999 was a 5% higher.

### **DEMOGRAPHICS:**

The survey captured the opinion of 49% female and 51% male students, which reflected the demographic profile of the schools. In addition the students ranged in age from 11 to 17 and were drawn from form-levels 3, 4 and 5. Significantly, this year's survey captured the opinion of 6% more boys than in 2002, which reflects an increase in the quantity of boys enrolled in Barbadian schools.

### **MAJOR OBSERVATIONS/ISSUES:**

The survey determined that 32.5% of students in the age groups surveyed had at some time taken one or two puffs of a cigarette. This pattern of experimentation differed between boys and girls by 5%, with boys accounting for 35% and girls, 30% of students who had taken one or two puffs of a cigarette. This experimentation was not repeated in most cases, leaving 0.6% of students who could be considered daily smokers. This level of experimentation was lower than the 1999 level which was 36% and did not differ significantly between boys and girls. This overall reduction in the level of experimentation was gender biased since girls experimented much less, while experimentation among boys did not change significantly.

Among daily smokers some 3% indicated that they had a desire to quit smoking and this was evenly distributed among male and female students. Moreover, only 1% of smokers manifested habitual indicators such as a desire to have a morning cigarette.

Possible influences to student smoking were examined and it was found that parental smoking was quite rare. Only 3% of both parents smoked; however, a higher number of fathers (15%) than mothers (3%) smoked and interestingly this level of parental smoking was similar to what was detected in 1999.

The media was also identified as a possible influence. 76% of students recalled *anti*-smoking messages in various sections of the media compared with 60% of students who saw smoking messages and 92% who might have been influenced by the sight of actors smoking on television. It would appear that advertising promoting smoking was less visible to students in 2002, however, anti smoking messages were also lower in this period.

It would appear that the school was still an underutilised source of influence since only 42% of students interviewed recalled being exposed to anti-smoking education in schools. Additionally 30% of the students indicated that smoking and health was never discussed as part of lesson.

### **TOBACCO USE:**

Most students surveyed indicated that they started either experimenting, or smoking at the age of 12, or 13. Boys started at 10 or 11, while girls usually commenced at 13 or 14 and smoking ages were similar to those established in 1999.

Students usually obtained cigarettes through either buying them directly from a vendor (2%) or machine (0.5%). Of the students who bought cigarettes, only 2% indicated that they were ever prevented from buying because of their age. Students generally smoked in their home (9%) although in-home smoking was 3% lower than 1999. Smoking in friend's homes stood at 4%, social events (3%) and public places (3%). Smoking in the school was not the preferred venue and only happened in 1% of cases.

### **KNOWLEDGE AND ATTITUDE TOWARDS TOBACCO:**

In response to questions on their perception of smokers, 75% of students said that they would not be influenced by close friends to smoke, however, there was a 8% -15% level of uncertainty in relation to this question. Responses indicated that smoking for boys was seen as a significant popularity boost with 31% indicating that boys who smoked cigarettes had more friends, compared to 17% who indicated they had fewer friends. The reverse was noted for girls where the responses indicated that girls who smoked cigarettes had fewer friends (16%), while those who did not smoke had more friends (35.5%). Therefore, students had a lower opinion of girls who smoked than boys who smoked, suggesting a gender bias that makes it more acceptable for boys to smoke than girls. These general perceptions were similar to those established in the 1999 GYTS survey.

## **SMOKING AND HEALTH CONCERNS:**

In total 83% of the students felt that smoking was dangerous to their health while a lower number (60%) definitely felt that second-hand smoke was hazardous to their health. This reflects a lower level of confidence in the dangers of smoking this year, since the level of certainty was 90% in 1999. The majority of students (77%) supported the banning of smoking in public places. Additionally, among those who smoked, health reasons (7%) and family dislike (2%) emerged as the main motivations to stop smoking.

## **THE USE OF ALCOHOL AMONG STUDENTS AND THEIR FRIENDS:**

In response to questions on the use of and experimentation with alcohol, responses indicated that 87% of students have experimented with low alcohol content alcoholic beverages and 65% with high alcohol content beverages, which is coincidentally higher than the numbers experimenting with cigarettes. Curiously the data collected this year shows no significant gender bias, while in 1999 male students started using substances earlier and were inclined to harder substances than female students. The majority of students indicated that they had their first drink between ages 12 – 13 (21%), with a large number indicating their first drink was age 7 or younger (18%).

## **SPORTS, COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES AND DRUG USAGE:**

Among the students, 17% reported experimenting with illegal drugs and 13.5% of the students who play sports, indicated that they would take drugs if they believed it could better their performance. As for anti-drug education in school, 56% reported having been exposed to such instruction in primary and secondary schools. The prevalence of anti-drug education was clearly higher at the primary school level (24%) than at the secondary level (7.5%).

## **SEXUAL ACTIVITY:**

Student responses to questions on their level of sexual activity indicate that slightly less than half of the students are sexually active and more boys than girls are active. The single largest group of persons admitting to sexual activity is 12 years old or younger; however, a major limitation of this type of analysis would be the fact that the term “*sexually active*” can be subjected to various interpretations.

Against this background of sexual activity, it is perhaps fortunate that 87% of students have been exposed to sex education classes at either the primary or secondary level and lowest level of exposure was among 13 year old students.