

Nearly 7 in every 10 students reported to watch bidi advertisements on billboards and in social events in Uttranchal. One in every 10 students reported that they had been offered free samples of cigarette and *gutka* and *Bidi*.

Discussion

This study provides first representative database on tobacco prevalence among school going children in the age group of 13-15 years in Uttranchal state.

The present study finds that a significant proportion of the youth in the state use tobacco products.

Nearly 3 in every 10 of the youth that participated in the survey admitted to have ever used tobacco and nearly 2 in every 5 of the students were currently using any tobacco product, 17.6% used smokeless tobacco and 3.8% revealed to smoke any tobacco product. Surprisingly for all categories of tobacco use, there is no significant difference among boys and girls. Tobacco industry is destroying the social norms in India.

Uttranchal has been separated very recently from UP which is one of the states where a lot of tobacco is cultivated⁷. High prevalence of tobacco among the youth in the Uttranchal state may therefore be attributed to easier access of raw tobacco to the young people in the entire state of undivided UP and high rates of tobacco use in the community by adults (in undivided UP)⁸. Adults tobacco use before adolescents create an environment in which adolescent perceive tobacco use/smoking as social norm. This becomes more alarming when a section of adolescent population remains ignorant about harmful effects of tobacco use and they have positive attitude for tobacco use by others. This holds true for uttranchal; 4 out of 10 students are ignorant about harmful effects of tobacco use; 3 in every students % think boys and girls who smoke or chew tobacco have more friends and boys and girls who smoke or chew tobacco look more attractive

The survey results also show that nearly three fourth of the ever tobacco users reported they started tobacco use/smoking at an early age of less than 10.

On the possibility for the non-smokers/non users to initiate smoking by the year 2003, almost one in every 10 non users said they would.

The young people consider smoking as a normal social behaviour and tend to correlated smoking with independence and an appearance of confidence, an image that is intensively projected in tobacco advertising and promotional activities. Roughly more than seven in every 10 students in Uttranchal are exposed to tobacco products advertisements in all kinds of media. There is no regulatory effort to check such promotions of tobacco products by Uttranchal government.

Some earlier study in India have shown that youth targeted sports sponsor by tobacco companies and advertising through TV depicting a high life style of smoking influence the children's mind and helps initiate smoking in India ^{10,11}.

Most of the homes and places frequented by the youth interviewed do not have anti-smoking rules within their premises; almost 2 in every 5 and 1 in every 2 students said they were around others who smoke in their homes and other places (other than their homes) respectively, in a week prior to the interviews. The apex court in India has banned smoking in public place ⁹. However the efforts to protect non-smokers from the health effects of passive smoking are not being supported by the Uttranchal government.

Youth freely buy cigarettes and gutka from any tobacco retail outlets. The situation has been aggravated by the influx of vendors distributing free tobacco products samples. One in every 10 students had been offered free cigarette, bidi and gutka samples. Since cigarettes are sold loose, there by making access by everyone easy and relatively "cheap" vendors find this as an advantage to sell more tobacco products and operating at any point. It is hoped that when the comprehensive tobacco control bill will be passed by parliament and subsequently by Uttranchal Legislative assembly, the malpractice of selling harmful products like tobacco to young people would be arrested or reduced and tobacco advertising would be regulated.

School environment in UP is making considerable contribution on the providing pupils with messages on the harmful effects of tobacco as over 6 of every 10 students said that they were taught tobacco or health as part of lesson in classroom. Nearly half of the students said they had discussed the effects/dangers of smoking tobacco in a classroom. The survey results also show that family members (parents/guardians) assist greatly in educating their children on the dangers of smoking/chewing tobacco. About 7 in every 10 students (66.5%) said that family members had discussed the harmful effects of smoking or chewing tobacco. But, some parents/guardians set a very bad example for their children; nearly 4 in every 10 students reported that their parents smoke/chew tobacco.

There are several recent reports, predicting an increase in oral cancer incidence in India. This prediction is based upon observation of an increasing prevalence of oral submucous fibrosis, especially in younger individuals, caused by industrially manufactured smokeless tobacco products¹²⁻¹⁵. Majority of tobacco chewers in the present study reported gutka chewing confirming the countrywide trend of increasing gutka use. Gutka is one of the most highly advertised products in almost all media and it is noteworthy that tobacco users reported watching more tobacco advertisement compared to never users.

In Western settings, intervention programs have been successful, at least in delaying initiation of smoking¹⁶⁻¹⁹. Comprehensive school tobacco control policy comprising a combination of tobacco-free school policies and an evidence-based curriculum linked to community wide programs involving families, peers, and organizations with counter marketing campaigns and community-based activities have shown a success in reducing smoking in schools in USA²⁰. In India, Goa is one of the good examples in the country where comprehensive tobacco control policy seems to work. Tobacco use prevalence in Goa has been reported very low⁵ as compared to Uttranchal

(table 1 & 2) which has no state level policy. There is greater potential for school-based awareness programs in Uttaranchal as well as whole of India followed by cessation initiative.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made;

- (1) Initiation of Intensive education and awareness campaigns as majority of them are ignorant of the risks associated with the use of tobacco products/ ETS.
- (2) Schools in Uttaranchal need to have curricular practices and tobacco policy prohibiting tobacco use by students, school personnel and any visitor in school premises. And also since a significant proportion of the youth start smoking at the age of 10 (or less), there is need for tobacco control education to be introduced at an early age, possibly at school inception and those parents and guardians must be involved in the campaign.
- (3) Lobbying for anti tobacco legislation, which will regulate marketing and distribution of tobacco products and ban tobacco advertisements and tobacco sponsorship to sports. It would be useful to monitor how the tobacco industry adapts its strategies to induce young people into smoking so that appropriate Counteractions should be developed.
- (4) Framework public policies and enact and enforce tobacco control legislation that would prevent the youth from buying tobacco products and tobacco trade.
- (5) Training of media personnel on how to effectively inform and educate the public, more especially the youth, on issues pertaining to tobacco use.
- (6) In order to obtain a more comprehensive picture of tobacco prevalence among the youth in the state, the survey needs to be repeatedly done (possibly once in every three years) and should also be expanded to the youth who are not school goers.