

Prevalence of use of Tobacco among Male Medical Students in IGMC Shimla, Himachal Pradesh, India

A.K. Gupta, S.R. Mazta, Saurabh Kumar, Ivan Joshi

Department of Community Medicine; Indira Gandhi Medical College, Shimla, Himachal Pradesh, India

Abstract: The objective of the study was to find out the prevalence of tobacco use among male medical students; and also the factors associated with the use of tobacco. It was a cross sectional study of I.G.M.C. Shimla. 132 Medical students of all the phases of MBBS. Pre-tested closed ended questionnaire. 38.2% of male medical students have tried tobacco in one/other form. 84% of the students experimented with tobacco at ≥ 18 years. 92% of tobacco products users had closest friends who used to smoke. **Conclusion:** The results in the study are discouraging and reveal that the medical knowledge regarding the ill effects of tobacco use has not been able to check its use.

INTRODUCTION

Smoking and health are intimately related and thus, smoking among future health care personnel such as medical students is an important issue. Medical students are generally in the age group 17-25 years. This is the time when lifestyle patterns, both healthy and unhealthy, are formed. Moreover, as future doctors, they are the role models for the lay persons in regard to smoking habits. As medical students, their behavior regarding the use of tobacco equals or even exceeds the rate in non medical peer group. WHO has included prevalence of tobacco use among as physicians, nurses, other health workers, etc. among the indicators which should be monitored by each country¹. Therefore, the purpose of present study was to evaluate the use of tobacco in the male medical students and to elucidate the factors associated with its use.

MATERIALS & METHODS

A cross sectional study among male medical students was conducted during July-August 2009 at our institution. The participants were administered pretested and predesigned questionnaire in separate classes on the day. All the male college students of different classes present on the investigation day were selected for the study. Anonymity and confidentiality was assured. One hundred thirty (132) two filled up questionnaires were received out of which one was rejected as it was not filled up completely. The information regarding age, age at initiation, precipitating factor for the initiation, form of tobacco product used, pattern of tobacco use and use of tobacco by their family members, knowledge about use of tobacco in public places and about anti-smoking law was thus collected.

The following definitions were used: **Ever used** was defined as having used tobacco even once in their lifetime. **Never used** will be defined as having not used tobacco even once in life time.

The data thus collected was entered into Microsoft excel sheet 2007 and was analyzed by using Epi Info 3.5.1.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The mean age of the male medical students in the study students was found to be 20.63 years. 52% were spending more than Rs 200/ month on tobacco products. It was found that 92% of tobacco products users had closest friends who used to smoke. The overwhelming effect of peer pressure on the initiation of tobacco use is a matter of serious concern because it is very difficult to prevent the effect of this factor in an age group which likes the company of their friends as well as is influenced maximally by them, more so while living in a hostel away from their homes. The web of causation of this particular factor is very complicated and it has a direct as well as an indirect and synergistic effect with other factors.

The history of a family member smoking, in tobacco a user was seen in around 34% of the cases. There was no significant relationship between the presence of a smoker in the family and picking up the habit in the present study which is in contradiction to other studies^{2,4}. There was also absence of association between family supervision and preventive effect as 66.4 % of the students ($n_1=50$) who were ever users of tobacco products had received informal education from their parents. This is in contradiction to the preventive effect of parental supervision on the use of tobacco evident in similar studies done in Orissa⁵ and in Pakistan²¹ with hostellers

using more tobacco as compared to day-scholars.

The effect of an actor using tobacco products on TV or in a movie was also a significant contributory factor in the tobacco users with 38% answering in affirmative.

Thought 88% of the students who ever used tobacco said that they were taught about tobacco and its adverse effects but still a significant proportion was of the opinion that there is no anti tobacco law in the college campus.

Table 1: Comparison of Characteristics between students belonging to ever used tobacco and never used tobacco groups

Characteristic	Ever used tobacco	Never used tobacco	Chi Square value
Status of tobacco use	62%	38%	
Smoking history in closest friend			
Present	46(92%)	49(60%)	$\chi^2 = 16.65$
Absent	4(8%)	32(40%)	p value<.05
Association of smoking on being offered by friends with ever tobacco use			
Present	25(50%)	2(2.5%)	$\chi^2 =42.69$
Absent	25(50%)	79(97.5%)	p value<.05
History of a family member smoking			
Present	17(34%)	24(29.6%)	$\chi^2 =0.2746$
Absent	33(66%)	57(70.4%)	p value<.05
Feeling of tobacco use after seeing actor			
Present	19(38%)	5(6.2%)	$\chi^2 =20.93$
Absent	31(62%)	76(93.8%)	p value<.05
Tobacco smoking makes girls/boys look attractive			
Yes	11(22%)	4(4.9%)	$\chi^2 =8.876$
No	39(78%)	77(95.1%)	p value<.05
Knowledge about anti-tobacco law in the college campus			
Knew about the law	17(34%)	43(53.1%)	$\chi^2 =8.953$
No rule exists in the college	31(62%)	29(35.8%)	p value<.05
Did not know	2(4%)	9(11.1%)	
Discussion of harmful effects with the family members			
Yes	34(68%)	53(65.4%)	$\chi^2 =.0913$
No	16(32%)	28(34.6%)	p value>.05
Taught about harmful effects of tobacco use			
Yes	44(88%)	64(79%)	$\chi^2 =1.725$
No	6(12%)	17(21%)	p value>.05

CONCLUSION

The results in the study are discouraging and reveal that the medical knowledge regarding the ill effects of tobacco use has not been able to check its use. Reduction in the use of tobacco among medical students is needed so that the general public can accept them as their role models in the smoking cessation activities. The social acceptability of tobacco use contradicts the strong health education and health promotion messages discouraging it. Due consideration should be given to ways to try and help the majority of current students who smoke and wish to quit. Whilst at the same time emphasis should be placed on enforcing the Anti-Tobacco law banning the use of tobacco in and around the college campus. Importantly, specific training and counseling of the students on a regular basis should be undertaken to help them overcome the desire to indulge in this deadly habit.

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