

Social factors of spreading of tobacco smoking among college students

Factores sociales de la propagación del tabaquismo entre estudiantes universitarios.

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Abstract

The objective of an empirical study of the social factors of spreading of smoking among college students was to identify the influence of the social environment and lifestyle on the formation of addiction. In our study, we relied on the concept of a value-social model of health. The materials of the study, which included a student survey ($n = 495$, proportional selection by gender, age, year of study) and a standardized interview with youth professionals ($n = 21$), analyzed the main motives for smoking youth, attitudes towards a healthy lifestyle, attitude towards smoking peers. A comparative analysis of the data was carried out in subgroups of smoking and non-smoking students. The results of the study showed the lack of formation of negative attitudes to smoking in the vast majority of students. According to 25% of smoking students and 39% of non-smoking students, smoking is one of the tools of communication and integration in the new team. 45.6% of all respondents cited group exposure and conformal behavior as reasons for starting smoking. The results on assessing attitude to smoking from the perspective of fashion and social recognition turned out to be unexpected: the number of non-smoking students who think that smoking is fashionable is 17 times exceeds the number of smokers who share these beliefs. A comparison of the data indicates a probable reason for this distribution of answers: in everyday life, smokers are faced with various legislative restrictions and social censure, while their non-smoking peers focus on the socio-communicative and recreational effects of this habit. Students demonstrated a high level of awareness of the negative effects of smoking. One fifth of students (20.9% non-smokers and 22.1% smokers) proposed banning tobacco advertising as preventive measures. In the Russian Federation, the ban has been in force since 2013. It can be assumed that the placement of information on the dangers of tobacco consumption works as a trigger, and is perceived as an advertising message by part of the audience. This hypothesis needs further refinement and will be verified by a separate study.

Keywords: smoking, addiction, social factors of smoking, smoking prevention, healthy lifestyle.

Resumen

El objetivo de un estudio empírico de los factores sociales de la propagación del tabaquismo entre los estudiantes universitarios fue identificar la influencia del entorno social y el estilo de vida en la formación de adicciones. En nuestro estudio, confiamos en el concepto de un modelo social de valor de la salud. Los materiales del estudio, que incluyeron una encuesta estudiantil ($n = 495$, selección proporcional por género, edad, año de estudio) y una entrevista estandarizada con profesionales de la juventud ($n = 21$), analizaron los motivos principales para los jóvenes fumadores, las actitudes hacia Un estilo de vida saludable, actitud hacia los compañeros de fumar. Se realizó un análisis comparativo de los datos en subgrupos de estudiantes fumadores y no fumadores. Los resultados del estudio mostraron la falta de formación de actitudes negativas hacia el tabaquismo en la gran mayoría de los estudiantes. Según el 25% de los estudiantes fumadores y el 39% de los estudiantes no fumadores, fumar es una de las herramientas de comunicación e integración en el nuevo equipo. El 45,6% de todos los encuestados citó la exposición grupal y el comportamiento conforme como razones para comenzar a fumar. Los resultados sobre la evaluación de la actitud hacia el tabaquismo desde la perspectiva de la moda y el reconocimiento social resultaron ser inesperados: el número de estudiantes que no fuman que piensan que fumar está de moda es 17 veces superior al número de fumadores que comparten estas creencias.



Una comparación de los datos indica una razón probable para esta distribución de respuestas: en la vida cotidiana, los fumadores se enfrentan a diversas restricciones legislativas y censura social, mientras que sus compañeros no fumadores se centran en los efectos socio-comunicativos y recreativos de este hábito. Los estudiantes demostraron un alto nivel de conciencia de los efectos negativos del tabaquismo. Una quinta parte de los estudiantes (20.9% no fumadores y 22.1% fumadores) propuso prohibir la publicidad del tabaco como medidas preventivas. En la Federación de Rusia, la prohibición ha estado en vigor desde 2013. Se puede suponer que la colocación de información sobre los peligros del consumo de tabaco funciona como un disparador, y es percibida como un mensaje publicitario por parte de la audiencia. Esta hipótesis necesita más refinamiento y será verificada por un estudio separado.

Palabras clave: tabaquismo, adicción, factores sociales del tabaquismo, prevención del tabaquismo, estilo de vida saludable.



Introduction

All over the world today, the problem of strengthening and maintaining the health of youth is acute and urgent, since the future of the state largely depends on the physical, psychological and social health of young people. The important causes of young people's health problems include not only hereditary factors, the environmental component, but also social models, behavioral patterns related to the lifestyle of young people and their social environment.

In our study, we adhered to the biosocial and value-social models of health that are widely represented in the scientific literature [Faresjio, 1992; Cockerham, 1997; House, 1988; Berkman, 2000, Cohen, 2000; Marmot R Wilkinson, 2005; McDowell, 2006, Kawachi, 2008, and others]

According to WHO [Global Burden of Diseases, 2013], tobacco smoking, food addiction, alcoholism and drug addiction are among the top ten of the most dangerous global causes of harm to health. In this regard, we would classify smoking as the most dangerous, since the availability of tobacco contributes to the growth of its consumers, including among young people. Smoking, for example, according to WHO estimates, causes death of almost 6,000,000 people annually in Russia. It is believed that by 2030, possible losses could amount to about 8,000,000 people. In the world, the number of smokers is about 40% of the total population [Kuvshinov].

Over the past few years, Russian society has showed a positive trend in cessation of addictions - more and more young people, especially in large cities, live a healthy lifestyle: it has become fashionable to monitor the state of your body, make investments in your health, engage in disease prevention, and eat healthy food. The importance of the relationship of lifestyle and behavior aimed at achieving positive trends in their health, the impact of the social environment on the formation of smoking habits was pointed out by many researchers [Gulliver, 2006; Daponte-Codina, 2009; Jarvis, 2009; Zhuraleva, 2013, and others]. Russian researchers note that indicators of the level of education, family income per capita and the absence of a smoking habit are positively associated with the level of physical activity of students. With increasing age, the acquisition of a working status (as opposed to student status), and marriage, the involvement in sports practices decreases [Kolosnitsyna, 2018].

Youthful age is one of the key periods in the formation of personality, which is especially important for the formation of a socially approved, self-preserving, healthy lifestyle-

oriented behavior model.

The need to study the social factors of the spread of smoking among college students is that:

- firstly, the demonstration of addictive behavior is still one of the channels for build communication among teenagers in the new social environment;
- secondly, smoking is the least expensive and more affordable way to demonstrate this behavior;
- thirdly, sociocultural practices are the most significant tool for identifying youth, and the choice of practices affects further involvement in various communities.

Methods

In order to study the social factors of the spread of tobacco smoking among students of professional educational institutions, the team of the Department of Social Work of the Belgorod State National Research University conducted an applied sociological study, which included a survey of students from three professional educational institutions of a technical, humanitarian and medical profile (OGAPOU Belgorod Polytechnic College, Engineering College NRU "BelSU", Medical College of Medical Institute of National Research University "BelSU", n=495, proportional selection based on gender, age and year of study) and standardized interviews with specialists working with youth (n=21).

The main problems considered in the research:

- study of motivation and attitudes towards smoking among young people;
- identification of the relationship between the need to establish social communications among peers and smoking;
- study of the direct causes of smoking among college students;
- study of the awareness of youth professionals about the motives of smoking among students.

Results and Discussion

In vocational schools represented in the sample, the largest number of smokers (37.3%) are students of a technical college, the least (14.1%) are students of a medical college. It can be assumed that these differences are associated with the characteristics of the gender composition of students (in a technical college, most students are young men), as well as with the specifics of professional education and the degree of awareness of the negative consequences of smoking by medical college students. The data of

the current study are confirmed by the results of the study by E.N. Andreicheva conducted among students of Kazan Medical University, where "12% of respondents smoke daily, and another 8% do not smoke every day" [Andreicheva, 2011]. In engineering college, the percentage of smokers was 19.5%, which can be explained by the homogeneity of indicators of gender and professional composition of students.

Young people understand the dangers of this habit, and quite often are not ready to openly answer the question about smoking and prefer to demonstrate a socially approved position in their answers [Nevzorov, 2010]. Answering the projective questions, respondents noted that "friends" smoke in 81.4% of smoking students and in 31% of non-smoking students. The survey results showed that 69.9% of non-smokers and 79.1% of smokers regard smoking as a neutral phenomenon. Such results, on the one hand, reflect the age-specific characteristics of the respondents. For adolescence and early adolescence, typically contradictory, inappropriate and external (institutionally defined), and internal (internalized) social requirements, behavior [Petrova, 2013]. Less than 20% of respondents condemn smoking, among them 8.1% smoke themselves. Such low rates testify to the lack of formation of negative attitudes to smoking.

At the same time, it is possible to trace differences in the attitude to smoking as a phenomenon both for smoking peers and potential spouses. 10.5% of smokers and 2.5% of non-smokers are positive about smokers, 88.4% and 81.4% are indifferent, respectively, 1.2% of smokers and 16.1% non-smokers. It is obvious that the factor of personal relationships is of great importance in the assessment. Non-smokers are more tolerant of smoking peers than of smoking in general (29.6% condemn smoking, 16.1% condemn peers). With regard to potential spouses, the opinions of smokers and non-smokers were divided. Students who smoke are more tolerant of the presence of such a habit in their future spouse (unambiguously against 34.9%, indifferent - 25.6%, found it difficult to answer - 26.7%, 12.8% are sure that the spouse will also smoke) than students who are not exposed to this habit (negative attitude - 47.8%, indifferent - 16.4%, only 2.5% are ready to put up with a smoking spouse).

According to research V.D. Gatal'skii [Gatal'skii, 2010], the cultural and educational environment is the most important space of socialization and self-realization for the student. Therefore, nicotine addiction can be considered as a "social infection", the spread of which occurs, as a rule, within the reference social group. It is no accident that in our study, the most frequently observed social causes of smoking by students are the

desire to be an adult (23.2%), 36.7% of the respondents smoke "joining the crowd", and 23.6% follow fashion. An interesting fact is that among non-smoking students who think that smoking is much more fashionable than among smokers (1:17), this is probably due to the fact that smokers face various restrictions (legislative), often the inability to give up cigarettes (dependence) and condemnation in society.

Relieving stress and striving for emotional balance are the most common psychological causes of smoking. 24.9% of smokers of respondents noted that smoking calms, 29.0% smokers to relieve stress. 2.7% wrote that smoking uplifted. It should be noted that more than a quarter of smokers (25.3%) among the causes of smoking indicated habit, smoking addiction, as well as insufficient willpower (14.9%). Non-smoking students consider the lack of willpower (30.7%) and exposure to the influence of the group (25.6%) to be the most significant causes of smoking. Influence by other's opinions (45.6%), lack of will and weakness (42.5%) that are indicated by most students as personality traits that contribute to the onset of smoking.

A correlation analysis of issues related to personal motivation for smoking / non-smoking allows us, as leaders for smokers, to identify motives related to the need to overcome stressful situations and recreational needs. The data obtained are confirmed by a sociological study of Russian sociologists Zh.V. Zhiratkova, T.E. Petrova, A.V. Leontieva, where stress or personal problems, curiosity, the influence of friends became the most common reasons for starting smoking (Zhiratkova, 2018). The influence of the environmental factor, social and communicative needs for recognition, acceptance and support are estimated by smokers as less significant in comparison with students who are not exposed to this habit ("to join the crowd" - 25.6% and 39.4%, "fashionable" - 7.0% and 27.5%, 23.6%, "I want to be an adult" - 10.5% and 26.2%, respectively).

A rather high percentage of answers of both groups of respondents (smokers and non-smokers) indicating unknowing motives for smoking is indicative: "just for kicks" 23.3% and 23.7, "out of curiosity" 18.6% and 16.8%. A significant discrepancy is observed in the assessment of "pampering" as a motive for smoking (14.0% and 20.7%). The results of the author's study are consistent with the data presented in the study by N.V. Gorbunov, O.S. Polunina, A.G. Serdiukov: 23.4% of medical students of one of the Astrakhan medical universities started smoking "just for kicks" [Gorbunov, 2012].

Our study traces the relationship between the smoking of respondents and the presence of this habit among close relatives. In 54.7% of



respondents, one or more family members smoke. Basically, initiation to smoking occurs at the age of 13-15 years, which is confirmed by the results of other studies [Zagrebin, 2014; Kashapov, 2017]. The increase in the number of cigarettes smoked per day as they grow older confirms our

assumption about the delay in the start of preventive work with adolescents and its poor effectiveness (Table 4).

Table 4 - Dynamics of the number of cigarettes smoked per day as smokers grow older (100% of the number of smoking respondents)

Number of cigarettes	Smoked at the beginning (%)	Smoked now (%)
1 cigarette	23.3	6.9
2 cigarettes	19.8	9.2
3 cigarettes	18.6	12.6
4 cigarettes	7.0	10.3
5 cigarettes	7.0	12.6
6 cigarettes	7.0	2.3
8 cigarettes	1.2	6.9
9 cigarettes	1.2	1.1
10 cigarettes	9.3	11.5
12 cigarettes	2.3	2.3
15 cigarettes	3.5	4.6
17 cigarettes	-	2.3
20 cigarettes	-	6.9
30 cigarettes	-	2.3

A gender comparison shows that most young men and girls smoke up to 10 cigarettes a day, but it is indicative that 2.3% of girls and 11.4% (five times more) of boys smoke a pack per day (20 cigarettes). The data obtained are related to the study by I.V. Zhuraleva, L.Iu. Ivanova, G.A. Ivakhnenko [Zhuraleva, 2013, p. 114].

The data obtained from a mass survey on the age of start of smoking suggests that preventive work should be started with children aged 7-9 years in primary school, while in colleges it is necessary to concentrate on secondary prevention of smoking, familiarization with physical education and sports, promote healthy lifestyle, use effective methods of modern medicine, psychology, psychotherapy and social advertising.

The general level of awareness of the consequences of smoking among students in vocational schools is quite high. They attribute to the most common consequences of smoking

(multiple choice): “lung diseases” - 71.0%, “oncological diseases” - 54.2%, “shortening of life” - 54.2%, “cardiovascular diseases” - 36.9%. Only 3.1% of respondents do not know anything about the negative effects of smoking. The results of the author’s study are consistent with the conclusions presented in the monograph of the Institute of Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences, edited by I.V. Zhuravleva: a high level of students' knowledge about the negative impact of smoking on the human body was discovered [Student Health, p. 86]

In the distribution of answers to this question among educational institutions, students of a medical college showed expectedly higher awareness (Table 1).

Table 1 – Awareness of the effects of smoking

What are the effects of smoking on human?	Educational institution (college)		
	technical	humanitarian	medical
Cancer	45.1%	50.8%	59.7%
Lung diseases	43.1%	67.7%	81.1%
Cardiovascular diseases	35.3%	29.2%	44.7%
Life shortening	41.2%	42.1%	39.3%
I do not know	5.9%	5.1%	0.5%
Death	13.7%	17.9%	13.1%

The picture of students' awareness of the negative effects of smoking is supplemented by questions from a questionnaire about passive smoking and its effect on others. 82.7% of the students surveyed have a clue of passive smoking, 10% do

not know, 7.3% found it difficult to answer. Most students are aware of the negative effects of passive smoking (78.1%). Moreover, the degree of awareness of students of educational institutions of different profiles does not differ



significantly.

The most effective measures for smoking prevention were the ban on the production and sale of tobacco products, increasing prices for tobacco products and stopping cigarette advertising. The choice of the latter option seems rather unexpected to us: on the one hand,

advertising of tobacco products is prohibited by law, on the other hand, this may be due to the opposite effect of anti-advertising (threatening inscriptions and images, warning captions, etc.), which attracts excessive attention of young people. (Table 2).

Table 2 – Smoking prevention measures

What should be done to prevent young people from starting smoking?	Do you smoke?	
	yes	no
Do not sell cigarettes	38.4%	39.9%
Talk about smoking / convince people of its harm	10.5%	19.9%
Stop advertising	20.9%	22.1%
Stop production	43.0%	50.0%
Raise price	22.1%	30.1%
Popularize healthy lifestyle	3.5%	1.1%
Do not pay attention / nothing will help	9.3%	3.0%
Proper education	1.2%	0.5%
Work with a psychologist / psychotherapist	0.0%	0.5%

Smoking respondents (89.6%) realize the health risks of smoking and make attempts to give up smoking. 70% of respondents tried at least once to quit smoking, and 60.9% of them did it more than once. This is due to the significant psychological and physiological severity of the process of quitting smoking, which is often not recognized (“have no desire / I can, but I don’t want” - 46.8%). Nevertheless, more than half of the smoking respondents (52.1%) say they would not have begun to smoke if, before they became addicted to a cigarette, they knew everything about smoking. 68.1% would like to be non-smokers.

Therefore, teenagers need qualified medical and psychological assistance, associated primarily with the formation of adequate ideas about the mechanisms of occurrence of tobacco dependence and ways to overcome it.

There are some contradictions in the interpretation by students and youth professionals of the causes of smoking. The list of selected reasons why young people smoke in the answers of the respondents of both groups basically coincide: peers, fashion, desire for adulthood, independence, irresponsible attitude to health, misunderstanding of the harmful effects of smoking. Experts in their assessments did not choose psychological factors noted by students, such as the desire for emotional balance, stress relief. This may indicate a lack of knowledge by

specialists in work with young people of the psychological characteristics of age and inattention to the emotional state of pupils. In addition, among the causes of smoking, students indicated nicotine addiction, a habit, and specialists indicated students' confidence that they could quit smoking at any time, which indicates an underestimation of the degree of addiction.

Youth specialists consider the main factors of motivation to quit smoking as a healthy lifestyle (61.6%), physical education and sports, health problems, systematic preventive measures in an educational institution (46.2% each), strong-willed qualities (38.5%). Given the complexity of this process, the involvement of specialists (a psychologist, a psychotherapist) seems to be mandatory, while respondents indicated this factor in only 15.4% of cases, which indicates a low degree of awareness of the role of socio-psychological support by youth specialists in providing qualified assistance to students for giving up smoking.

Low awareness among youth specialists was also manifested in questions regarding the positive motivation of students to quit smoking. The experts surveyed indicated that among their wards only 38.5% want to quit smoking; while the survey of students revealed 68.1% of those who would like to give up smoking, and even more those who have already made such attempts (70%).

Conclusions

Based on the study, we can conclude that the overwhelming majority of college students have a low prevalence of negative attitudes to smoking. Young people consider tobacco smoking as a recreational and social-communicative practice,

which, on the one hand, helps to overcome the effects of stressful situations, and on the other hand, creates the prerequisites for communicating with strangers and facilitates integration in the new team. Conformism is an incentive to start smoking: being exposed to a group and not having other common interests, teenagers become



involved in smoking as a form of social participation. Non-smoking students called smoking a "fashionable" social phenomenon 17 times more often than their smoking peers. Students demonstrated a high level of awareness of the negative effects of smoking. Smoking respondents (89.9%) noted they have made attempts to overcome addiction by reducing the number of cigarettes and quitting smoking, more than half of them did it more than once. More than half of the respondents noted they would not start

smoking if they knew everything they know about smoking. Youth specialists who are engaged in social and educational work with students have demonstrated a low degree of awareness about the motives of students' smoking. According to the results of the study, seminars were held for such specialists with the involvement of expert psychologists and doctors to clarify the specifics of the mechanisms of formation of dependence and modern means of treatment and prevention of nicotine addiction.

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Lazurenko N.V. - preparation of a research program, tools, preparation of the text of the article.
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