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*The problem of tobacco smoking among the young people
under the survey research. II. Grammar school students*

Wide social education is one of the possibilities of efficient anti-nicotine action. The adolescents should be the first to be included in the action of making aware of negative effects of tobacco smoking because as it results from earlier own researches (1) and data obtained by other authors (2–4), most of young people start smoking as early as in primary school.

Not long ago the addiction to tobacco smoking was the most socially accepted habit and it was considered as relatively innocent and harmless in comparison to alcoholism or addiction to drugs, although there are numerous scientific proofs that confirm the connection between smoking and both occurrence and development of numerous diseases (5).

The knowledge of both the extent and the results of this phenomenon, as well as the awareness of attitudes towards tobacco smoking in the particular social or age group, determines the condition of effectiveness of anti-tobacco actions.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Survey research concerning the problem of cigarettes smoking among grammar school students involved 866 people (461 boys and 405 girls), aged 13–15, coming from different regions of south-eastern Poland and from different environments.

While conducting the research, an attempt was made to preserve a constant proportion between sexes in order to obtain the material, which guaranteed comparable results. The obtained data were presented in percentage and demonstrated on graphs.

The survey included 24 questions including factors, which may influence taking up smoking by students, such as the place of residence and socioeconomic reasons, the causes leading to giving up the habit and the level of knowledge about the harmful effects of smoking.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The conducted research showed that the percentage of smokers among grammar school students amounted to 10.63% among boys and to 8.40% among girls. The age when boys reach for the first cigarette fluctuates between 5 and 14 years. Girls had the first contact with a cigarette at the earliest at the age of 6, and at the latest, similarly to boys, at the age of 14. It is worth noticing that 29.80% among those boys and 18.80 % of girls do not continue smoking.

To the question “Does anybody in your family smoke?” 62.04% of boys and 66.83% of girls answered in a positive way. According to a collective study by Adamek (5) about 4 million children in Poland are exposed to passive smoking at home and each day about 500 children reach for the first cigarette in their lives. It seems that among grammar school students, similarly as among primary school pupils, the first contact with a cigarette results from an easy access to a cigarette in the family environment. The model of behaviour presented by adults leads to the continuation of smoking (1).

As the conducted research showed, the highest percentage of smoking adolescents live in big cities that number up to 100,000 inhabitants. The percentage of smokers amounted to 51.02% among boys and 55.88% among girls. There was a noteworthy percentage of smokers among youngsters inhabiting villages – relatively 28.57% and 38.23%. Very few girls smoke in small towns (2.94%), there are much more smokers among their peers (20.41%). There were no smokers among the examined boys who live in cities above 100,000 inhabitants, and among girls only 2.94% smoke cigarettes (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Percentage of smoking girls and boys depending on the place of residence (percentage of smoking in different environments)

Analyzing the obtained results one can suppose that the high percentage of smokers among grammar school students from cities counting up to 100,000 inhabitants is connected with intensive social lifestyle of this age group (significant possibilities of contacts with peers at simultaneous higher freedom of going out). Significant escalation of bad habit of smoking among youngsters inhabiting villages may be also connected with higher freedom of staying out, which, among other things, can be caused by the necessity of commuting to school. The little amount of smokers among the examined in this study grammar school students from big cities arouses astonishment. This fact can be explained by increasing fashion for non-smoking in particular social-cultural circles.

The conducted research showed analogous dependence between the habit of smoking and the level of their parents' education, as it was found among primary school pupils (1). The least percentage of smoking children occurs in families in which both parents have got primary education. It amounts for boys 14.28% if a mother smokes and 10.20% if a father smokes; for girls relatively 2.95% and 8.83%. The highest percentage of smoking students was estimated in case when parents have got secondary education – for boys 63.26% and 65.30%, and for girls relatively 67.65% and 58.82%. The in-between percentage concerns grammar school students whose parents have got higher education. For boys it amounts relatively 22.46% and 24.50%, and for girls relatively 29.40% and 32.35% (Fig. 2).

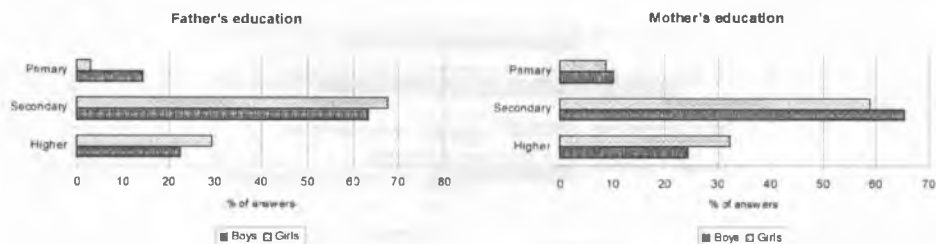


Fig. 2. Dependence between children's smoking and the level of parents' education (percentage of smoking in the total examined group)

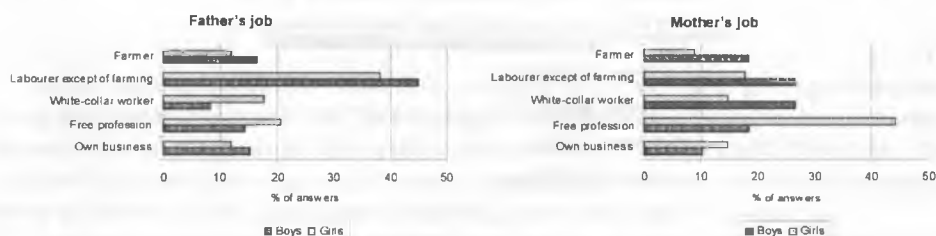


Fig. 3. Relation between smoking by children and the parents' job (percentage of smoking in the total examined group)

Among grammar school students the highest percentage of smoking boys (44.90%) and girls (38.23%) occurs when a father works as a labourer, except of farming. Comparable percentage (44.12%) was estimated among girls whose mother has got a free profession. In other cases smokers make up from a few percent (8.83% among daughters of women farmers) to less than 30 percent (26.53%) among sons of women who work as labourers, except of farming, or as white-collar workers).

The percentage of boys who smoke only in a group of peers amounts to 32.73%, and of girls as many as 28.17%. It indicates that both sexes are susceptible to the influence of girlfriends and boyfriends to almost the same degree. The significant percentage of children smoking only outside home – 37.17% of boys and 42.25% of girls – indicates that a considerable number of parents or guardians do not tolerate smoking cigarettes by children. However, the majority of parents either consent to smoking at home or spend a lot of time outside home which gives the youngsters the opportunity to smoke without any control. The answer “I smoke only in permitted areas” was given only by boys – 9.75%. Similarly to primary school pupils, it suggests the lack of reaction on adults' part, when they see a smoking student (1). Despite prohibition both boys (20.35%) and girls (29.58%) smoke (Fig. 4).

The results of the survey research indicate that more than 50% of grammar school students smoke only sporadically. The percentage among boys amounts to 53.27% and to 55.17% among girls. A dozen or so percent of polled individuals smoke not more than five cigarettes a day – 14.95% of boys and 12.07% of girls. Up to 10 cigarettes daily smoke 8.41% of boys and 15.52% of girls and more than 20 cigarettes a day – 14.02% of boys and 10.35% of girls. It is worth noticing that there is a higher percentage of girls smoking 5 to 10 cigarettes a day in comparison with boys (Fig. 5).

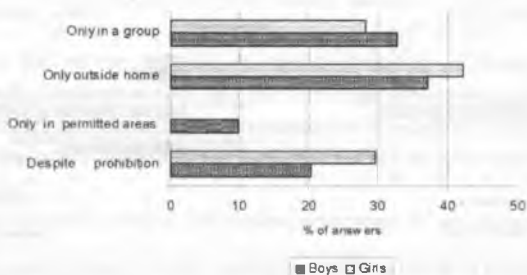


Fig. 4. Circumstances of smoking (percentage of smoking in the total examined group)

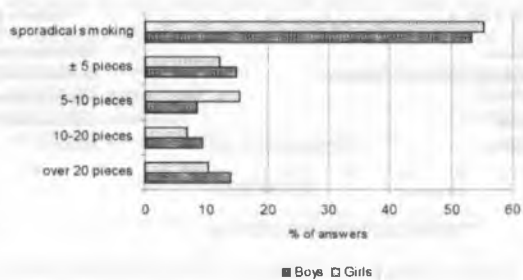


Fig. 5. Number of cigarettes smoked by children (percentage of smoking in the total examined group)

Although for several years in magazines there have been published many articles about harmfulness of smoking cigarettes, as well as there have been broadcasted plenty of programmes on TV and despite the prohibition of smoking in public places, the percentage of smoking girls at the age of 12–15 is the same (15.52%) as Paszkowski announces (6) for the first class of high schools in the 90's of the 20th century (16.0%).

In comparison to primary school pupils, higher percentage of grammar school students smoke more than 20 cigarettes a day, which should become an alert signal to take up actions aiming to limit the habit of smoking cigarettes among this age group of adolescents.

Similarly to primary school pupils, the influence of peers is definitely the main reason of starting smoking by grammar school youngsters. Under their influence 58.82% of boys and 45.45% of girls have begun smoking. The influence of parents is also quite a significant reason for boys to begin smoking – 24.19% of answers. This factor to a significantly lower degree contributed to the decision of starting smoking by girls – only 6.5% of answers. The obtained data indicate that boys are less susceptible (13.45%) to advertisements presenting cigarettes than girls (22.08%). Girls also appear to be twice more perverse towards prohibition (25.97%) than their peers (10.08%) (Fig. 6).

The obtained results indicate that similarly to younger age group (10–12 years old) (1), among the four mentioned factors the most significant one which induces to undertake smoking, especially by boys, is peers' influence (Fig. 6). It may be also stated that the girls' susceptibility to cigarettes advertisements has significantly increased with age while the boys' susceptibility to this factor has significantly decreased. The example of smoking parents has got less influence on students from this age group (12–15 year olds) than the younger one (10–12 year olds) (1).

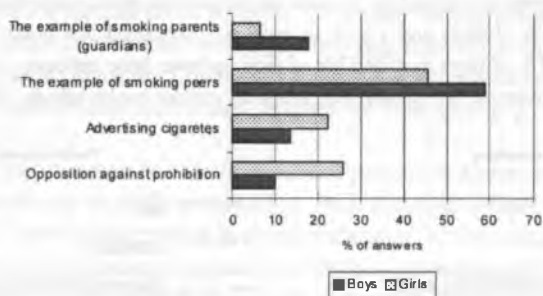


Fig. 6. Reasons of beginning to smoke cigarettes (percentage of smoking in the total examined group)

Among smoking schoolboys, 72.0% of the examined declare the will to give up smoking and among their female colleagues 75.0%. The knowledge about the harmful effects of smoking is the most important reason they indicate for making such a decision for 48.0% of boys and 47.37% of girls. It is confirmed by a higher percentage of girls' answers connected with pregnancy as the factor influencing giving up this habit (Fig. 7) in comparison to answers given by girls aged 10–12 years (1).

The high position among the important reasons for giving up this habit also occupy the following factors: no-smoking peers' influence, their own disease, parents' influence and the death of a close person caused by smoking. Appeals in mass media appeared in a little amount of answers – under their influence only 9.6% of boys and 7.89% of girls declared the decision of giving up smoking. There are 19.93% of boys and 12.59% of girls who cannot be convicted to giving up smoking by anything. The reasons classified as 'other' were mentioned by the similar number of boys (16.3%) and girls (17.78%) (Fig. 7).

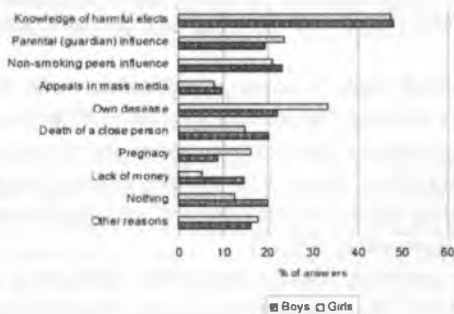


Fig. 7. Decisions of giving up smoking and their reasons (percentage of smoking in the total examined group)

Therefore health motivation as well as parents' and peers' influence matter for grammar school students when they make a decision to give up smoking.

Relatively little amount of grammar school students claim that active smoking does not influence health. The percentage of boys giving such opinion amounts to 9.82% and of girls only 1.91%. In the opinion of 15.64% of boys and 11.11% of girls smoking has got little influence on health. The highest percentage of positive answers was obtained in connection with serious health disorders – opinions about an exceptionally high harmful effect of smoking express 74.55% of boys and 86.98% of girls.

Similar opinions were expressed by students in connection with health disorders dependent on passive smoking: 7.85% of boys and 3.21% of girls are convinced that passive smoking does not influence health, 24.77% of boys and 19.53% of girls indicate little influence. 67.37% of boys and 77.26% of girls are convinced that passive smoking has serious health effects (Fig. 8).

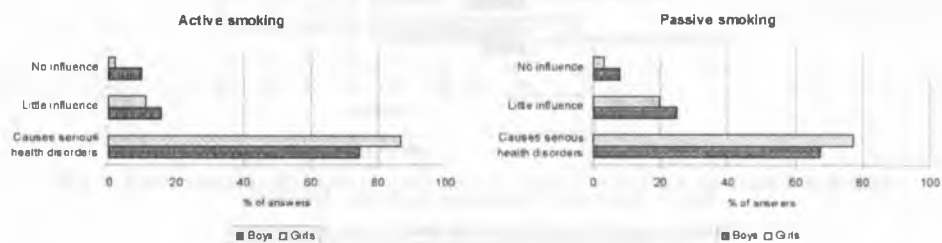


Fig. 8. Opinions about smoking influence on health (percentage of smoking in the total examined group)

The awareness of harmfulness of smoking among grammar school students is paradoxically lower than among primary school pupils. Among other things, it is indicated by the higher percentage of answers to the question 'should a pregnant woman smoke'. A positive opinion was expressed by 9.04% of boys and 6.84% of girls. The percentage of the examined grammar school students who try to persuade smokers that their habit is harmful for people staying close to them in a fumed room is, as a matter of facts, high and it amounts to 63.10% of boys and 65.5% of girls. However, these results are lower than those obtained among primary school pupils by Osińska et al. (1).

The knowledge of the subject of diseases connected with smoking is broader among grammar school students than among primary school pupils. They enumerate not only heart and lungs diseases but also several types of tumours – a cancer of lungs, larynx, oesophagus and breast. They also connect smoking with infertility. Much more diseases connected with smoking were enumerated by girls.

Similarly to primary school pupils, grammar school students, who do not actively smoke, are seriously disposed to passive smoking. The problem involves 61.81% of boys and 55.59% of girls.

The conviction of effectiveness of anti-tobacco campaigns is lower among grammar school students than among primary school pupils. Only 38.26% of boys and 43.65% of girls gave the positive answer to the question about the effectiveness of such actions while the positive answers among primary school pupils amount to 50% (1).

As it results from the conducted research adolescents reach for a cigarette very early. The obtained data are consistent with other studies which indicate that children start smoking as early as at the age of 11 and between 12 and 14 they smoke permanently. Although this phenomenon occurs among both sexes, smoking among 13-year-old girls is more popular than among boys (1–4).

Therefore, it seems indispensable to take up actions which can prevent grammar school students from reaching for cigarettes and, if they already smoke, to persuade them to give up smoking (7).

CONCLUSIONS

- Grammar school students have the first contact with smoking when they are 5–14 years old, which indicates an easy access to cigarettes in the home environment or in the social circle.

2. The impulse for starting smoking most often comes from smoking peers and parents. To a smaller degree, the first contact with cigarettes is connected with advertisements.

3. A small scale of smoking cigarettes by grammar school students who come from big cities seems to result from increasing "fashion for non-smoking" in particular social-cultural circles.

4. Both health motivation and the influence of parents and peers can play a significant role in making a decision to give up smoking. Anti-nicotine actions may appear hardly efficient because of "perversity" which is characteristic of adolescents.

5. Grammar school students have considerable awareness of diseases connected with smoking tobacco – they enumerate not only heart and lungs diseases but also several types of tumours – lungs, larynx, oesophagus and breast cancers, as well as infertility.

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SUMMARY

On the basis of the survey, an effort was made to estimate the problem of smoking cigarettes by grammar school students aged 12–15. Survey research involved 461 boys and 405 girls from schools in different regions of south-eastern Poland. Questions included such factors as the place of residence, the parents' education level as well as their occupation, the circumstances and the number of cigarettes smoked a day and also the reasons for starting smoking. Possible reasons, which may determine giving up smoking, were also taken into consideration. According to the survey data, the youngsters had the first contact with cigarettes at the age of 5–14, and first and foremost they followed the example of their peers, and to a considerably lower degree, the example of their parents. As the combination of the data shows, the awareness of harmfulness of smoking turned up to be a strong motivation to give up smoking, while appeals in mass media, lack of money to buy cigarettes, and even the pregnancy period were hardly motivating. The obtained data allow to state that grammar school students have got considerable awareness of harmfulness of tobacco smoking.

Problem palenia tytoniu wśród młodzieży w świetle badań ankietowych.

II. Uczniowie szkół gimnazjalnych

W pracy podjęto próbę oceny problemu palenia papierosów przez uczniów w wieku 12–15 lat na podstawie badań ankietowych. Badaniami objęto 461 chłopców i 405 dziewcząt ze szkół południowo-wschodniej Polski. W pytaniach uwzględniono miejsce zamieszkania uczniów, wykształcenie i zawód rodziców, okoliczności i liczbę wypalanych dziennie papierosów, a także przyczyny rozpoczęcia palenia. Uwzględniono również ewentualne przyczyny, które mogą zdecydować o zaprzestaniu palenia tytoniu oraz stopień wiedzy o szkodliwości palenia. Dane ankietowe wykazały, że pierwszy kontakt młodzieży gimnazjalnej z paleniem papierosów następuje w wieku 5–14 lat. Dzieci sięgają po papierosa przede wszystkim za przykładem kolegów, w dużo mniejszym stopniu rodziców. Silną motywacją do zaprzestania palenia tytoniu jest dla uczniów szkół gimnazjalnych wiedza o szkodliwości palenia, natomiast w małym stopniu apele w środkach masowego przekazu czy brak pieniędzy na zakup papierosów. Uzyskane wyniki pozwalają na stwierdzenie, iż uczniowie mają wysoką świadomość szkodliwości palenia tytoniu.