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FREQUENCY OF TOBACCO USE AMONG TBILISI STATE MEDICAL UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN GEORGIA

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თამბაქოს მოხმარების სიხშირე თბილისის სახელმწიფო სამედიცინო უნივერსიტეტის სტუდენტებს შორის საქართველოში

თბილისის სახელმწიფო სამედიცინო უნივერსიტეტი, თბილისი, საქართველო
დაავადებათა კონტროლისა და საზოგადოებრივი ჯანმრთელობის ეროვნული ცენტრი, თბილისი, საქართველო

რეზიუმე
თამბაქოს მოხმარება საზოგადოებრივი ჯანმრთელობის ერთ-ერთი ყველაზე მნიშვნელოვანი პრობლემაა. მონაცვისაგან გამონწვეული სხვადასხვა ზიანის მიუხედავად (არავადამდები დაავადებების გაზრდილი რისკი, სიცოცხლის ხანგრძლივობის კლება, ნეგატიური გავლენა ეკონომიკურ და სოციალურ ასპექტებში), მსოფლიოში ამჟამად მილიარდზე მეტი მწეველია და 2030 წლისთვის თამბაქოს მოხმარებამ შეიძლება ყოველწლიურად 8 მილიონზე მეტი ფატალური შედეგი გამოიწვიოს. თამბაქოს ზრდასრული მომხმარებლების უმრავლესობა იწყებს მოწევას 18 წლის ასაკამდე და მოზარდების დაახლოებით 20% მოიხმარს თამბაქოს. აქვე უნდა აღინიშნოს, რომ დაბალი და საშუალო შემოსავლის მქონე ქვეყნების მოსახლეობის თამბაქოს მოხმარების მაჩვენებლები მკვეთრად მაღალია. მსოფლიოს მწეველთა 80%-ზე მეტი დაბალი ან საშუალო შემოსავლის ქვეყნებში ცხოვრობს, შესაბამისად, ამ ქვეყნებში მაღალია თამბაქოს მოხმარებასთან დაკავშირებული ავადობისა და სიკვდილიანობის მაჩვენებელი.

ამ სტატიის მიზანია თბილისის სახელმწიფო სამედიცინო უნივერსიტეტის სტუდენტებში თამბაქოს შემცველი პროდუქტების მოხმარების შეფასება.

Tobacco use is a major public health problem globally. Despite over 50 years of sound evidence of tobacco-related harms (e.g. increased risk for no communicable diseases (NCDs), decreased life expectancy, negative impact on economic, social, couple, end family aspects) [1], there currently more than one billion smokers in the world, and by 2030, tobacco smoking could cause more than 8 million deaths annually [2]. A significant majority of adult tobacco users begin smoking before they reach the age of 18 [3], and about 20% of adolescents globally use tobacco [4]. One significant concern is that low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) are disproportionately impacted by tobacco use, with over 80% of the world's smokers residing in LMICs, and thus tobacco-related morbidity and mortality [2].

One LMIC overburdened by tobacco use is Georgia. Smoking and passive smoking are among the main public health issues in Georgia. The most recent national survey of substance use in Georgia (2022) indicated that, among the 4076 adults interviewed, more than half (57.1%) had ever tried tobacco products. The mean age for the first tobacco products use was 18 years, and 29% reported daily cigarette use [6].

The landscape of the global tobacco market has changed dramatically in the past 10-15 years, and now includes a variety of tobacco products, including smokeless tobacco products, cigars, electronic vapor products (e.g., e-cigarettes), and heated tobacco products (HTPs). However, e-cigarettes and HTPs have become among the most prevalent tobacco products used among the youth. In 2022, about 1 in 7 high school students (14.1%) reported past-month-cigarette use [5]. Evidence suggests that HTP and e-cigarettes are primarily used in conjunction with other products, particularly among the youngest age group and individuals who have never smoked before.

The aim of this study was to assess the prevalence of smoking any tobacco containing products among students at Tbilisi State Medical University. The study of student tobacco use and related factors

involved a cross-sectional online survey conducted between June and December 2022 among a random sample of students of Tbilisi State Medical University (TSMU). Only TSMU students in one of 4 study programs were eligible: Georgian MD program, English MD program, Bachelor program of Public Health, and Master program of Public Health. At the time of data collection, there were 6342 students in those faculties.

We administered the survey by emailing potential participants the online survey (i.e., URL for the survey programmed in Survey Monkey), which presented the consent form and an explanation of the purpose and methods of the study. Those who provided consent were then advanced to complete the survey.

The survey included following sections assessing: (1) academic and Sociodemographic characteristics, (2) tobacco use history (ever and past-month use, age of initiation, cessation attempts and resource use, purchasing behaviors). The questionnaire was created in both the Georgian and English languages and pretested with a random sample of 20 students from Tbilisi State Medical University. After the pilot some modifications were implemented in order to enhance the readability, clarity, and comprehensibility of the questionnaire.

Academic and Sociodemographic Characteristics. Participants were asked to report their degree program (Georgian MD program, English MD program, Bachelor program of Public Health, Master program of Public Health), year in the program, time spent engaged in schoolwork, average grade, gender, age, country of nationality, country they spent the most time, employment status, income, household composition (i.e., who else lives in their home), and highest degree earned by either parent.

Tobacco Use. Tobacco use history was assessed by asking, "Which tobacco products have you ever tried/used in your entire lifetime (check all that apply): Traditional cigarettes; Electronic cigarettes; IQOS; Cigars; Bidis; Hookah; I have not tried any tobacco products at all; Prefer not to answer; Other (please specify)." Those reporting any lifetime use of any product were asked, "How old were you when you first tried any tobacco product?"; "How many days in the past 30 days have you used: Traditional cigarettes? Electronic cigarettes? IQOS? Cigars? Bidis? Hookah?"; and "How often do you use/have used more than one tobacco product on the same day? Always, Most of the time, Sometimes, Rarely, Never, Prefer not to answer."

Results.

Socio-Demographic Characteristics - The sample consisted of 629 students from the Tbilisi State Medical University who agreed to be interviewed. 68.9% were female, 31.1% were male. Major of cohort population was in age group 19-23 and 72.4% of them were not employed. Around 1/3 of the respondents live with parents or with friends. The majority of the students are in first year and from Georgia and India. Up to ½ of them is a student of MD English Program.

Tobacco Use Prevalence - 46.9% of respondents reported that they have not tried tobacco product at all. The majority reported 19 years as the age of the first try. Only 7.6% perceived themselves as almost every day smokers. 62% reported trying to quit smoking and the most common way (1/2) for it was Cold Turkey (stop smoking all at once without medication or nicotine replacement products) followed by switching to IQOS or/and electronic cigarettes. The majority of respondents think, that in case they decide to quit smoking, they will not use any specific method, as doctor, healthcare profession, etc. 66.1% of smoker respondents are using more than one tobacco product on the same day. The absolute majority of them state, that they almost never go through to ID check when purchasing tobacco product at a store. Almost 50% of smokers reported that there is at least one tobacco smoker in their household.

Conclusion. Evidence suggests that HTPs and e-cigarettes are primarily used in conjunction with other products, particularly among the youngest age group and individuals who have never smoked before. The dual use of these products, along with their significant popularity among younger generations and the interest expressed by non-smokers, raises concerns and underscores the necessity for diligent surveillance of e-cigarette and HTPs. Surveillance for tobacco product use and related factors among young individuals is of utmost importance as it serves as a critical tool for informing and assessing tobacco control strategies implemented at local, state, tribal, and national levels.

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SUMMARY

Tobacco use is a major public health problem globally. Despite over 50 years of sound evidence of tobacco-related harms (e.g. increased risk for noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), decreased life expectancy, negative impact on economic, social, couple, end family aspects), there currently more than one billion smokers in the world, and by 2030, tobacco smoking could cause more than 8 million deaths annually. A significant majority of adult tobacco users begin smoking before they reach the age of 18, and about 20% of adolescents globally use tobacco. One significant concern is that low- and middle-income countries are disproportionately impacted by tobacco use, with over 80% of the world's smokers residing in LMICs, and thus tobacco-related morbidity and mortality. The aim of this article was to assess the prevalence of smoking any tobacco containing products among students at Tbilisi State Medical University.

Keywords: Frequency, tobacco, Tbilisi State Medical university, students, Georgia