

Commentary

Tobacco and its impact on younger generation – A short commentary

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Abstract

Tobacco consumption is widespread in India and this habit can result in Oral cancer and few people die due to the spread of oral cancer. Every year May 31 is celebrated as World No Tobacco Day to encourage the public to reduce the consumption of tobacco and the ill - effects of tobacco on health. This year on 31 May 2024, the World Health Organisation encouraged young children to be protected from the industries producing tobacco. The newer trends of consuming tobacco among adolescents are by the means of e-cigarettes. Dentists especially Oral Medicine experts should know the tobacco cessation approaches to help adolescents to quit the tobacco habit. Pharmacological as well as psychosocial intervention should be provided to the younger generation who have a tobacco addiction and these interventions will be helpful to quit the habit of consuming tobacco.

Keywords: Tobacco consumption, Health impacts, Tobacco industry, Dental role.

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1. Introduction

Tobacco consumption has become very common all over the world and is one of the causes of the development of oral cancer. The Indian population is the highest in the world for the development of oral cancer due to the habit of tobacco consumption.¹ The other areas of the body involved with cancers associated with tobacco consumption include lung cancer, nasal cavity cancers, oesophageal cancers, paranasal sinus cancers, stomach cancer, pharyngeal cancer, and laryngeal cancer.² The toxicity of the tobacco can even result in the death of the individual consuming tobacco. The previous data showed about 8 million population die every year due to diseases caused by tobacco consumption.³

Tobacco is consumed in the form of smoking and chewing (smokeless). Tobacco in the form of smoking is available in different forms including bidi, cigars, pipes, cigarettes, and hookah.⁴ Smokeless tobacco is available in different forms including gutkha, moist snuff, dry snuff, zarda, betel quid, and toombak.⁴ Tobacco affects the

systemic health and oral health of the individual consuming tobacco.⁵ Tobacco in the smoking form can affect the oral cavity through periodontal disease, gingival recession, staining of teeth, leukoplakia, cancer, and premature loss of teeth.⁵ Smokeless tobacco affects the oral cavity by enamel erosion, root caries, gingival recession, halitosis, leukoplakia, and cancer.^{6,7}

2. Tobacco Consumption among Younger Generation

Every year 31 May is celebrated as World's No Tobacco Day to increase awareness among the public about the harmful effects of tobacco and various oral diseases that can result from consuming tobacco. This initiative helps the public to decrease the consumption of tobacco and thereby reduces death. This year 31 May 2024, the World Health Organisation encouraged young children to be protected from the industries producing tobacco. Based on the Global Youth Tobacco Survey done in India in the year 2019, the percentage of tobacco users among 13-15-year-old young individuals was found to be 9.6% for boys and 7.4% for girls.

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³ The most popular method of tobacco consumption is by smoking cigarettes.⁸

The prevalence of tobacco consumption among adolescents in India within the age group of 13-15 years is 1 among 10 and most of them usually start consuming tobacco before the age of 10.⁹ The newer trends of consuming tobacco among adolescents are by the means of e-cigarettes. E-cigarettes are comprised of e-liquid which is available in pen form, USB flash drives, and in traditional cigarettes.⁸ E-cigarettes are non-combustible tobacco products in the form of aerosols that adolescents inhale.⁸ These products release nicotine and other products like vegetable glycerine and propylene glycol which an adolescent gets addicted to and for them to quit the habit becomes very difficult. The tobacco industry manufactures these products and promotes them through advertisements and media. Most of the young population gets influenced by these advertisements related to tobacco and starts consuming tobacco at a very early stage. Hence the tobacco industry's tactics of increasing the demand for tobacco greatly increased and get addicted to tobacco at an early age. The use of e-cigarettes among adolescents decreases the immune function of the pulmonary system and increases the chances of respiratory infections.¹⁰ Studies have also shown that E-cigarettes can result in heart disease¹¹ and defects in brain development among young children.¹²

The protection of the young population from the influence of tobacco industries has been challenging in today's times. Addiction to tobacco habit among adolescents can be handled by two approaches - pharmacological and non-pharmacological approaches.¹³ The non-pharmacological approaches will help in counseling the adolescents for the cessation of the tobacco habit. The non-pharmacological methods of tobacco cessation include 5A's (Ask, Advise, Assess, Assist, and Arrange), 5R's (Relevance, Risk, Rewards, Repetitions, Roadblocks), and 5D's (Delay, Distract yourself, Drink water, Deep breath, Discuss your feelings).¹³⁻¹⁵ Pharmacological methods of tobacco cessation decreases the craving of nicotine and symptoms associated with withdrawal of tobacco.

Dentists especially Oral Medicine experts should know the tobacco cessation approaches to help adolescents to quit the tobacco habit. The younger generation with a tobacco addiction can be sent to Tobacco cessation centers for the initiation of the process to reduce the tobacco consumption habit and lastly quitting the habit. The younger generation with tobacco addiction should be asked about the details of their tobacco consumption habits followed by behavioral counseling. The younger generation should be convinced of the pharmacological and non-pharmacological approaches to quit the tobacco habit and recalled for follow-up at the dental office. Multiple sessions of counseling and visits to dentists will help motivate the younger generations to quit the habit of tobacco consumption.

Proper screening and diagnosis related to the habit of tobacco consumption among the young population should be done followed by necessary treatment for the control of habit-breaking of tobacco consumption. Young children should be engaged in extracurricular activities including sports, dance, singing, and others. This will also help in diverting their mind against tobacco use. Schools and playgrounds should be made free of tobacco zones, this will also decrease the use of tobacco in young children. Parents and families should also avoid using tobacco products as this will not influence young children to tobacco consumption.

3. Conclusion

Tobacco industries target the younger population and use strategies to promote the use of tobacco among adolescents. The advertisements related to tobacco use should be minimal as young children get influenced by these ads and start with tobacco products and get addicted to tobacco. The use of E-cigarettes among young children should be restricted. Educational programs related to the ill effects of tobacco consumption should be given to the younger population so that the younger population is free from consuming tobacco. The government should promote the anti-tobacco campaign to prevent tobacco use among the younger generation. The age criteria should be introduced to purchase tobacco products as this will control tobacco availability among young children.

Pharmacological as well as psychosocial intervention should be provided to the younger generation who have a tobacco addiction and these interventions will be helpful to quit the habit of consuming tobacco. Cessation programs to quit the habit of tobacco consumption among adolescents should be conducted. Dentists should be given proper training regarding tobacco cessation, and attend conferences that will help the younger generation to quit the tobacco habit. The cessation of tobacco habit will thereby decrease systemic and oral diseases.

4. Source of Funding

None.

5. Conflict of Interest

None.

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