**Tobacco Dependence in Adolescents: What lies ahead?**

Tobacco is among the most commonly consumed addictive substances by adolescents and young adults, second only to alcohol [1]. It has been found that 9 of 10 children initiate smoking before they reach 18 years of age and often stick to it. [2] Extensive tobacco use among youth has been found to escalate serious oral and systemic diseases. [3]. The most recent global prevalence of cigarette smoking was 11·3% (95% CI 10·3–12·3) in boys and 6·1% (5·6–6·6) in girls. [4] Therefore, it is important to understand adolescent tobacco dependence and its associated factors so that the problem of tobacco addiction in adults can be halted right where it starts, i.e. in adolescence.

**Adolescents and tobacco dependence:**

The article in this issue by Yang et al. reports the global prevalence of tobacco dependence as 38.4% (95%CI 34.0-42.7) among adolescents who currently smoke tobacco, which is quite high compared to other recent reports.[4] They also reported that exposure to second-hand smoke, parental smoking, closest friends smoking, tobacco advertisement exposure, and being offered free tobacco products were all positively associated with tobacco dependence among adolescents.

The use of tobacco by the parents, as well as second-hand smoke exposure, have been found to be strongly associated with tobacco use in young adolescents. [5] The article by Yang et.al strengthens the existing literature on tobacco usage in adolescents and its associated factors.

When it comes to addressing tobacco dependence, tobacco use prevention and tobacco cessation go hand in hand. Till now most tobacco cessation efforts have primarily focused on adults, emphasizing regular daily smokers. The study by Yang et.al highlights the necessity of tailor-made tobacco control strategies and measures in light of the prevalence of tobacco dependence among adolescents who currently smoke tobacco in different countries and World Bank regions, and the establishment of unified diagnostic criteria of tobacco dependence among adolescents for early identification and timely treatment, especially in countries with a high prevalence of tobacco dependence.

**Points to ponder:** Yang et al. provide valuable insights into tobacco dependence among adolescents worldwide and underscores the importance of addressing the social, environmental, and economic factors that contribute to tobacco use. This is of great value as the same factors that predispose adolescents to take up smoking are also contributing to making them tobacco dependent. The authors have acknowledged the limitations that the study relies on self-reported data, which may be subject to recall and social desirability biases. Also, questions related to tobacco dependence did not involve smokeless tobacco, which may lead to an underestimation of the extent of tobacco dependence. Smokeless tobacco is the predominant form of tobacco use among adolescents in South Asia [6]. Sex/gender is another significant construct which influences smoking initiation and concerted research efforts are required to understand the same.[7]

**Recommendations:**

The problem of tobacco dependence in youth is multi-faced and hence would need multipronged approach for its solution. Individual factors, family dynamics and the community, all play important role.

Better enforcement of the existing rules to prevent sales of tobacco to and by minors will help to deter early exposure to tobacco and would be helpful in the long run. Tobacco cessation programs should be aimed at adolescents with tobacco dependence and cater to their psychological needs. An increased push for in-depth research is needed to understand gender roles in tobacco dependence and cessation.

Other approaches may include restricting access to tobacco, limiting its marketing and conducting media campaigns which focus on the harmful effects of tobacco use. Improving tobacco prevention and cessation awareness activities at the school level by creating ‘Youth Ambassadors’ or ‘Champions’ might help gauge the impressionable young minds. Using social media to cater to the young population to spread awareness, e.g. influencers advocating for quitting tobacco, can also change the youth's attitude. Famous movie stars not supporting tobacco brands or surrogate advertisements would make an impact on adolescents as well the adults. Apart from these, better enforcement of the existing rules to prevent sales of tobacco to and by minors will help to deter early exposure to tobacco and would be helpful in the long run. Tobacco cessation programs are aimed at adolescents and cater to their psychological needs. An increased push for in-depth research is needed to understand gender roles in tobacco dependence and cessation. Prevention and cessation programmes must be designed to address other tobacco products besides cigarettes. Healthcare professionals have key responsibilities in preventing tobacco use among youth and their families, and they need to know more about effective smoking prevention and cessation strategies. Clinicians need to integrate tobacco counselling into health assessments of teenagers and be aware of the roles that families, communities and governments can play in promoting tobacco-free environments.[8]

Parents restraining themselves from tobacco use would also set an example that adolescents can look up to. As they say, any nation's greatest wealth and strength is its youth. The future of a nation lies in the hands of its posterity. Therefore, if we want to ensure a bright future for our world, we first need to strengthen and empower our youth and prevention of tobacco use is one of the best ways to ensure that.

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Fig 1: Average prevalence of current cigarette smoking, adolescents aged 13-15 years, by region

(Source:https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/who-global-report-on-trends-in-prevalence-of-tobacco-use-2000-2025-third-edition)

