



Tobacco Use among Iranian Students: A Public Health Challenge

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Dear Editor-in-Chief,

The prevalence of smoking among Iranian students is a significant public health concern, with an overall rate of approximately 13.56% among college and high school students. College students exhibit a higher smoking rate of 15.62% compared to high school students, who have a rate of 9.77% (1). Specific groups, such as medical students, report even higher rates at 19.2% (2), while approximately 7.8% of university students engage in non-daily smoking (3) (**Table 1**). This variation highlights the need for targeted public health initiatives to address the rising tobacco use among Iranian youth and to understand the underlying factors contributing to this trend. The issue of smoking among students is a complex public health concern influenced by multiple factors. Understanding how demographics, social influences, and behavioral factors interact is crucial for effectively addressing this challenge. Research indicates that these elements significantly impact students' smoking behaviors, influencing their decisions to start or continue smoking.

Demographic factors significantly influence smoking behavior among Iranian students, highlighting the need for targeted public health interventions. Research indicates that variables such as gender, age, and socioeconomic status play critical roles (2-4). For instance, the prevalence of smoking is notably higher among male students (33%) compared to female students (11%), with urban areas exhibiting greater rates than rural ones (5). Social influences, particularly peer pressure and a family history of smoking, also contribute significantly to smoking behavior. A study revealed that 51% of high school students had tried smoking, with friends being the primary influence (6). Geographic location is another critical factor affecting smoking prevalence; urban areas typically show higher rates than their rural communities. For example, students in northern Iran have significantly higher smoking rates compared to those in other regions (4).

Key Words: Iran, Students, Prevalence, Tobacco.

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Table 1: Smoking Prevalence among Iranian College and High School Students.

Group	Prevalence (%)	Reference
Overall (students)	13.56	1
College students	15.62	1
High school students	9.77	1
Medical students	19.2	2
Non-daily smokers (University)	7.8	3

Furthermore, social influences, including peer pressure and a family history of smoking, have been identified as significant correlates of smoking behavior among students. The influence of friends and social circles can lead to increased initiation and continuation of smoking, particularly in high school settings where social acceptance is paramount (2, 3). A study revealed that 51% of high school students reported having tried smoking at least once, with friends being a primary influence (6). The presence of smokers within a student's social circle significantly increases the likelihood of initiating smoking, emphasizing the importance of social dynamics in shaping these behaviors (7). Additionally, students with parents who smoke are more likely to take up smoking themselves, indicating a strong familial influence on smoking habits (3). Engagement in high-risk behaviors is often linked to smoking, with studies showing that non-daily smokers are more likely to engage in substance abuse and alcohol consumption. This correlation highlights the importance of implementing comprehensive interventions that address these interconnected behaviors, ensuring a holistic approach to prevention and treatment (1, 3).

The findings emphasize the urgent need for effective public health strategies aimed at reducing the prevalence of smoking among Iranian students. Potential strategies may include:

Improving student smoking awareness through education: Implementing targeted educational campaigns in schools

and universities can significantly enhance awareness of the risks associated with smoking and promote cessation resources. Comprehensive school-based programs that focus on health education and awareness are particularly effective, as studies have shown that such initiatives can positively influence students' attitudes toward smoking. By increasing students' knowledge of the dangers of tobacco, these programs can lead to meaningful behavioral changes among them (8-10).

Community engagement: Involving families and the community in tobacco prevention efforts can enhance the effectiveness of school-based interventions. Campaigns that engage parents and community members can help create a supportive environment for students (9, 11).

Policy implementation: Strengthening and enforcing policies that restrict tobacco advertising and sales to minors is crucial. Effective regulation can reduce accessibility to tobacco products and help normalize non-smoking behaviors among youth (11, 12).

Peer education programs: Training students to serve as peer educators can effectively disseminate information about the risks of smoking and promote healthy behaviors among their peers. This approach leverages social influence to discourage smoking initiation (9).

Targeted interventions for high-risk groups: Identifying and focusing on high-risk groups, such as male students or those with a family history of smoking, can help

tailor interventions to those who are most in need (6, 12).

High tobacco taxes: Enforcing higher taxes on tobacco products in Iran can effectively reduce smoking rates and improve public health. Despite recent tax increases, tobacco taxes in Iran remain low compared to global standards, with current taxes accounting for less than 25% of retail prices. The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends specific excise taxes, which significantly raise prices and discourage consumption. Studies indicate that a 10% increase in tobacco prices can lead to an 8% reduction in smoking rates in middle-income countries like Iran (13). Additionally, higher taxes generate revenue for health initiatives and help combat the illicit tobacco trade, making them a crucial component of comprehensive tobacco control strategies.

Research and monitoring: Ongoing research is essential for monitoring trends in smoking behavior and evaluating the effectiveness of implemented interventions over time (14, 15).

By adopting these strategies, public health initiatives can more effectively address the smoking epidemic among Iranian students, ultimately leading to a healthier future generation.

CONCLUSION

The rising prevalence of smoking among Iranian students, with an overall rate of 13.56%—higher among college students (15.62%), and medical students (19.2%)—is a pressing public health concern. Key demographic factors, such as gender and socioeconomic status, along with social influences like peer pressure and family history, significantly contribute to these behaviors. Targeted public health strategies are essential for effectively addressing this issue. These strategies should include educational campaigns to

raise awareness of the risks of smoking, community engagement initiatives, enhanced tobacco regulations, and peer education programs. By implementing these comprehensive interventions, it is possible to reduce smoking rates among Iranian students and promote a healthier future generation.

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