Full Length Research Paper

Attitudes of Iranian dental students towards smoking

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Many surveys throughout the world have evaluated the smoking behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes of dental students, but no information in details is available from Iran. A cross-sectional survey in classroom settings using a self-administered questionnaire was performed at the School of Dentistry of Shahid Beheshti Medical University in 2010. Results: 59.6% men and 40.4% women students, respectively, completed the questionnaire, with overall response rates of 95.6 percent. Tobacco smoking experience prevailed among males. Prevalence of tobacco smoking among the students was approximately 53% in men and 16% in women. Kruskal-Wallis test showed that there is not a significant relation between student’s grades and their attitudes towards smoking (p=0.073). In addition, students’ birthplace (urban, suburb, rural) did not found as a significant factor (p=0.941). Most dental students reported knowing the health hazards of tobacco. Most students in both groups believed that sale of tobacco products to people less than 18 years should be totally banned. Tobacco smoking experience is common among dental students in Iran. Targeted antismoking training should be mandatory for them.

Keyword: smoking behaviors, Tobacco, birthplace, antismoking.

INTRODUCTION

Tobacco use is the leading preventable cause of death in the world and by 2030; it’s expected to be the single biggest cause of death worldwide, accounting for about 8 million deaths per year. (WHO, 2008). Based on CDC reports, about 80% of smokers in the United States have begun smoking before 18 (CDC, 2001). It is estimated that two-third of Iranian smokers have experienced their first cigarette smoking at around 15 (Azaripour, 2007) and the prevalence of tobacco smoking in people aged 15-64 is about 12.5%, which is 23.4% among men and 1.4% among women (Meysamie et al., 2010).

Recently conducted studies show that personal, familial and social factors- such as having smoker friends (Kelley, 2004), positive reports of tobacco smoking by friends (Kenneth, 2003), knowing friends’ experiences on smoking (Christopher, 2006), presence of smokers among family members and harmful social environment (Hashemi, 2008, Mosaii-Fard, 2008) may lead adolescents and youths to smoking behaviors. Tobacco smoking has an addictive nature thus, treating it may be much harder than any other disease; a serious problem which necessitate taking global actions. According to the logical-practical theory, which is one of the most important theories for explaining smoking behavior, people’s attitudes have a critical role in leading them towards smoking (Piko, 2003).

A study in Oslo University about smoker foreigners
Table 1. Percentage of smokers in terms of gender and marital status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Smokers</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>p=0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital Status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>p=0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>59</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Mean scores of attitude towards tobacco smoking in men and women

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Men</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Women</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean score</td>
<td>48.1</td>
<td>Standard deviation</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>49.6</td>
<td>Standard deviation</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number</td>
<td>85</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>118</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

found Turkish and Iranian students as the most consumers of tobacco products (57.3% and 5.4% respectively). In the same study, figure of Iranian women, who smoke daily, reached to 24.6% which was the highest figure, after Turkish women, among female foreigners (Norwegian Institute of Public Health, 2005).

Various theories have been offered in order to facilitate behavior change in smokers. A vast majority of research have showed a correlation between behavior and attitude. In other words, attitudes are viewed as predictors of behaviors. Hence, the belief that deep understanding of attitudes regarding smoking behaviors as a critical component of treatment approach is widely accepted. Azjen and Fishbein’s Reasoned Action Theory and Azjen’s Planned Behavior Theory view people’s behavior as outcomes of their attitudes and social norms (Azjen and Fishbein, 1980, Azjen, 1991). Evaluation of people’s attitudes towards smoking helps health authoritative in realizing community reactive to smoking laws and norms.

In a study by Bagozzi and Baumgartner aimed at evaluating people’s attitudes towards smoking, it was found that smokers’ positive attitudes towards harms of smoking have been maintained; a finding which have been shown in another study by Pederson and Lefcoe regarding adolescents’ tobacco smoking (Bagozzi and Baumgartner, 1989, Pederson and Lefcoe, 1985). In a study by Shore and colleagues, which was a factor in the analysis of attitudes scale, four significant factors were found: interpersonal relations with smokers, social restrictions and laws on smoking in public places, health concerns, and tobacco products marketing (Shore et al., 2000).

Medical students are a model for others, especially for young people and their smoking behavior may have negative impacts on youths. Thus, the present study was aimed at determining factors and attitudes influencing on smoking behavior among medical students. Authors believe that this study provides useful and efficient information on prevention, treatment and quitting smoking and has some implications for health policymakers.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted on dentistry students of the Dentistry Department of Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Sciences in 2010. After gathering standard questionnaires, we used a 27-item self-administered questionnaire which included 9 items on demographic characteristics and 18 items regarding evaluation of attitude. After coordination with the university officials, questionnaires were distributed among all volunteer students, who were asked to fill out the questionnaires. Overall, 250 students participated in the study, among them, 11 students who did not fill out their questionnaires completely and their questionnaires were eliminated from the study. Therefore, sample size of the study was set at 239. Data scoring was based on a five-point Likert scale. In the pilot study carried by authors, the score of 0.83 was obtained for Cronbach’s alpha. Data were analyzed by SPSS v.17. In addition, t-test, Chi-Square, Pearson Correlation test and Kruskal-Wallis were used to analyze the data.

RESULTS

Out of 239 participants, percentage of men and women were 40.4% and 59.6%, respectively. Regarding the respondents’ grades, about 15% were in the first year of their study, 24% in the second year, 20% in the third year, 27% in the fourth year, 5% in the fifth year and finally, 9% in the sixth year. Data gathered showed that more than 82% of these students had come from urban regions to the university. About 82% of these students were single. When they were asked to assess their health status, 55% assessed themselves as ‘very healthy’, 41% evaluated their health as ‘normal’, and only 4%
recognized themselves as ‘unhealthy’. In addition, about 32 percent of participants had tobacco smoking experience (see table 1).

Table 2 shows the mean scores of attitudes in male and female students. Accordingly, there is not a significant difference between the mean scores of attitudes towards smoking in both genders (48.1% for men, 49.6% for women). Also t-test indicates that students’ gender is not a significant factor in determining their attitudes (p=0.08). Kruskal-Wallis test showed that there is not a significant relation between student’s grades and their attitudes towards smoking (p=0.073). In addition, students’ birthplace (urban, suburb, rural) did not found as a significant factor (p=0.941). Spearman Correlation test was used to evaluate relation between participants’ attitudes and their performance in tobacco-related issues. It showed that health attitudes towards harms of smoking will lead to a noticeable decrease in tobacco smoking (r=0.29). Also, it has been revealed that the older the students’ age is, the more negative their attitudes towards smoking is (r=-0.09).

The students’ attitudes towards smoking were obtained by summing up their attitude scores in each questionnaire. A score of 1 to 5 was assigned to each item: a score of 5 indicated the most positive attitude and 1 showed the most negative attitude. As a whole, this scoring method specifies a spectrum of total agreement to total disagreement. Hence, each questionnaire could have a score of 18-90, which could represent the general score of each participant’s attitudes towards smoking.

DISCUSSION

Based on our findings, about half of the students who participated in this study had negative attitudes towards smoking. A study conducted in Guilan University demonstrated that 86.9 percent of its students had negative attitudes towards smoking (Seyed et al., 2004). The present study confirmed students’ positive attitudes towards the role of smoking in friendship with the opposite sex and intimacy between genders, which is consistent with another study aimed at evaluating the relation between youths’ friendships and their misconduct (Dana, 2002). The least positive attitudes among the students were related to these items: Smoking helps you to decrease your weight (1.7%); Smoking helps you to gain self-esteem (2.1%); and Smoking gives you a sense of adulthood (2.9%) (table 2).

The participants’ age, their marital status, and their grades had no significant relations with their attitudes towards smoking (p=0.477, p=0.971, and p=0.26, respectively). Unlike our study, one case showed a significant relation between the participants’ grades and their beliefs in the harms of smoking (Gavari et al., 2004). The present study revealed no significant difference between students’ gender and their attitudes (p=0.19), which was inconsistent with a study done by Pico and his colleagues on youths’ attitudes towards smoking? In his study, women were more concerned about the social harms of tobacco smoking, comparing with men, and consequently, the prevalence of smoking in women was lower than men (Piko, 2003).

The study demonstrated that most of the students viewed tobacco smoking as a risk factor for health and believed that sale of tobacco products to people under 18 years should be totally banned and the likelihood of death among smokers is more than non-smokers (table 1).

In addition, a vast majority of students who participated in this study agreed that the range of places allowed for tobacco smoking should be decreased; tobacco smoking is, in fact, wasting money; and tobacco smoking damages health in general. Apparently, anti-tobacco activities across the society, especially in recent years, have led to attitude promotion among students. Regarding tobacco smoking as a recreation and fun, 36 percent of the students totally disagreed, comparing to 6 percent, who totally agreed with it. In fact only one-fifth of the participants viewed smoking only for fun. It seems that positive attitude towards smoking is the main cause of smoking among young people, especially this belief that tobacco smoking produces a sense of pleasure, ecstasy, and comfort (Mollazadeh, 2002). Additionally, almost 53 percent of participants in the present study viewed smoking as a way of impressing others, especially the opposite sex.

A study carried out in Iran showed that about 87 percent of students had positive attitude towards harms of smoking and a powerful relation between tobacco smoking and positive attitude towards it (Seyed et al., 2004). Torabi and colleagues in a study in Indiana University found a high knowledge and low attitude among American students (Torabi et al., 2002). The most important factors of smoking among students, as cited by one of recent studies, are intimate relation with smokers, pleasure, long study courses, despair on one’s future job, and viewing smoking as a form of leisure (Majidpour et al., 2005).

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