

Adolescent Cigarette Smoking and Tobacco Chewing in Nebraska

RECENT changes in the smoking practices of the nation's youth give cause to encourage those who have worked to reduce the incidence of adolescent smoking. In Nebraska, however, there is evidence that the prevalence of adolescent smoking is higher than in the nation as a whole.

Detailed national studies of the incidence of adolescent smoking have been conducted in 1968, 1970, 1972, 1974 and 1979.¹ During the first half of that period (1968-1973) the prevalence of smoking among boys stayed about the same, with the proportion of smoking in the 12-18 years of age group remaining around 16%. During the latter half of this period (1974-1979) there was a decrease in the proportion of boy smokers from 16% to 10.7%. This decrease was most marked in the oldest age group of boys — ages 17-18 — where the proportion dropped from 31% in 1974 to 19% in 1979.

Changes among the girls have not been as encouraging. Between 1968 and 1976, there were increases in the proportion of cigarette smokers in all age groups. In total, the proportion of female smokers increased from 8.4% in 1968 to 15.3% in 1974, and declined slightly to 12.7% in 1979. This decrease, however, was not seen equally in all age groups. There was no change among the older girls in the 17-18 years of age group.

In the past, smoking has been most prevalent among males. In 1968, about twice as many boys aged 12-18 smoked than did girls.

IAN M. NEWMAN, Ph.D.

ELIAS J. DURYEY, M.S.

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

By 1979, 12.3% of the girls smoked, compared to 10.7% of the boys. This difference was largely due to the fact that 26.2% of the girls ages 17-18 smoked, while only 19.3% of the boys in this age group smoked.

In 1980, a sample of 2,616 Nebraska youths in grades 7-12 were asked about their use of tobacco.

Smoking prevalence in Nebraska

In 1980, more Nebraska youths were smoking cigarettes than in the nation as a whole in 1979. The difference in the years in which the data were gathered is probably inconsequential in comparing the national and Nebraska results (Table 1). In this study and the past national studies, a smoker was a person who had smoked at least 100 cigarettes and was smoking cigarettes at the time of the survey.

Frequency

If young people smoke, they probably smoke daily. In this sample, 88.3% of the boys and 86.5% of the girls reported smoking daily. The remainder indicated they smoked at least weekly.

Table 1
Percentage smokers: Nebraska-USA

Age	Males				Females			
	1980 Nebraska		1979 U.S.A.		1980 Nebraska		1979 U.S.A.	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
12 - 14	23	6.0	18	3.2	15	3.5	24	4.3
15 - 16	68	13.3	51	13.5	81	16.2	46	11.8
17 - 18	77	22.0	72	19.3	84	23.2	98	26.2
	\bar{X}	= 13.5	\bar{X}	= 10.7	\bar{X}	= 14.0	\bar{X}	= 12.7

Rural/urban residence

Place of residence bears some relationship to smoking behavior. For both males and females, a greater proportion of youth who lived out of town but not on farms were smokers than were youth living on farms or in the town/city. Among the farm youth, smoking was least common. This pattern of differences was surprisingly similar for both males and females.

Types of cigarettes smoked

Among the boys, 95.9% and among the girls 95.1% smoked filter-tipped cigarettes. Of the boys, 82.5% smoked regular-sized cigarettes, 9.9% smoked king size, and 6.4% smoked 100 mm cigarettes. This compares to 65.4% of the girls who smoked regular sized cigarettes, 15.7% king-sized, and 18.4% who smoked 100 mm cigarettes. The reason for the tendency of girls to smoke the longer cigarettes is not clear.

Perception of danger

One question asked respondents to assess the relative danger (more dangerous, about the same, or less dangerous) of their cigarette compared to other kinds. Boys were much more likely than girls to state that their cigarettes were more dangerous than other kinds.

Prediction of future smoking practices

Compared to the national sample of adolescents, more Nebraska youth predicted they would still be smoking cigarettes in five years time. 64% of Nebraska males and 65.4% of Nebraska females indicated they would probably or definitely be smoking cigarettes in five years time. This compares with only 51% of the national sample males and 48% of the national sample females' responses to the same question.

Tobacco chewing

Tobacco chewing is reported as an increas-

ingly frequent practice among adolescents. Only 8 females admitted chewing tobacco. Among the males, however, 90 respondents (7.1%) said they chewed tobacco. 33 (36.6%) of these male tobacco chewers were smokers, and 57 (63.3%) were nonsmokers. 36% of these respondents chewed daily, 32% chewed weekly, and 32% reported chewing only about once a month. Chewing does not appear to be a new fad. 23% of the chewers reported chewing for more than 3 years, 47% had chewed for 2-3 years, and only 30% had chewed for a year or less.

Conclusion

Based on the data gathered in this study, it appears that Nebraska youths are more likely to be current cigarette smokers than are those of comparable ages in the nation as a whole. Similarly, more Nebraska youths have tried cigarette smoking and more predict they will still be smokers in five years time than do a sample of youth drawn from the entire U.S.A. This study assessed for the first time, the prevalence of tobacco chewing among a sample of Nebraska young people.

The fact that cigarette smoking is more prevalent among this sample of youth than among comparable national samples suggests that those determining policy related to health education, preventive medicine and the development of programs to reduce health risks in Nebraska should carefully assess the value of devoting special efforts to encourage reduction of this practice. As a single behavior, cigarette smoking probably contributes more to unnecessary morbidity and mortality than any other single behavior. As such, programs to encourage reduction of the practice deserve high priority.

1. Green D: Teenage smoking: intermediate and long range patterns, National Institute of Education. USDHEW, November, 1979.