

Prevalence of cigarette smoking and attitude towards anti-Smoking policies among high school students, Maldives

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Background

Tobacco smoking is a public health challenge that has tremendous health and economic burden on a country (Lim et al., 2012; World Health Organization, 2019). This addictive behaviour is primarily acquired during adolescence age (Gladwin et al., 2011; United States Department of Health and Human Services, 2014) and despite the implementation of various anti-tobacco policies, cigarette smoking remains high in the Republic of Maldives, with 4 in 10 men being daily cigarette smokers (Ministry of Health-Maldives & ICF, 2018; Tobaccocontrol.org, 2020; WHO-SEARO, 2018). Addu city is the second-largest city in the Maldives, yet no study has investigated cigarette smoking prevalence and attitude towards anti-smoking policies among high school students in Addu city. The aim of this research is to determine the prevalence of ever smokers, current smokers, smoking-susceptibility, and assess students' attitudes towards anti-smoking policies to facilitate evidence-based policy making.

Methodology

The study was conducted in Addu city using a self-administered questionnaire and included 335 high school students from Addu City, Maldives. Appropriate statistical analysis were performed, and any statistically significant result was reported using a p-value of < 0.05.

Results/Findings & Implications

The study showed the prevalence of ever-smokers was at 22.8% and current smokers at 4.74% with male predominance. Also, 32.2% of the students had tried E-cigarette/vapes. Additionally, the prevalence of smoking susceptibility was high at 44.2%. Out of the smokers, 20% of the smokers had the desire to stop smoking and 70.0% of the smokers stated the price of the cigarette as a reason to stop smoking. Support for anti-smoking policies was high among the non-smokers, 73.0% compared to current smokers, 12.5%.

Conclusion

This study shows the prevalence of cigarette smoking among the Addu high school students is lower than the national average, despite having a higher proportion of ever smokers. However, an alarmingly high prevalence of smoking susceptibility and e-cigarette use could potentially increase cigarette smoking in the coming years to which policymakers should stay vigilant.