

LETTER to the EDITOR

Editorial Process: Submission:10/04/2023 Acceptance:10/14/2023

Mitigating Smokeless Tobacco Use among School Going Adolescents: An Urgent Call for Intervention

Asian Pac J Cancer Prev, 24 (10), 3307-3307

Dear Editor

We commend the authors (Gupta et al., 2023) for their recent work titled 'Pattern of Smokeless Tobacco Initiation and Use among School going Adolescents in Delhi: A Mixed Method Study', which highlights a pressing concern in our society. The study sheds some light on the alarming trend of smokeless and smoking tobacco trends among school going adolescents specially from 9-11th standard age group. The issue requires our urgent attention and concerted efforts to safeguard the future of our youth.

The study rightly identifies the school going age group as a crucial period in their lives. This is a critical time where adolescents make various vital decisions regarding their academic career and prospects. Smokeless tobacco and tobacco smoking addictions during this phase of their lives not only hampers their studies, health and quality of life, it also subsequently leads to loss of potential human resource in our society.

It is noteworthy that smoking and smokeless tobacco consumption is the leading cause of oral squamous cell carcinoma (OSCC) globally and recent studies have shown an increasing trend in the number of young patients. (Costa et al., 2022; Sarode et al., 2021). It needs to be well understood that tobacco addiction poses a significant health risk, and its detrimental effects extend beyond the confines of personal choices, as it affects the entire community at large.

Moreover, school teachers have a significant impact on the lives of the school children. They are considered as not only educators but mentors and even role models. As such, it becomes imperative that teachers pay close attention to their pupils' behaviour and actively participate in counselling sessions. Such kind of regular involvement can assist identify students who might be at a greater risk to tobacco addiction and offer them appropriate guidance and support.

In addition, conducting routine oral examinations within the premises can help curb the situation. Dental healthcare practitioners are uniquely positioned to recognise early signs of tobacco related oral afflictions. Timely identification can galvanise urgent interventions while also serving as a catalyst for students to avert from tobacco.

In addition to these endeavours, there is an imperative need for comprehensive tobacco cessation programs and cognisance initiatives. Such programs can be integrated into the school curriculum and supplemented with peer and focussed group interventions. Peer pressure can be a powerful tool among adolescents and harnessing it

positively can be an effective way to mitigate addictive behaviour.

In conclusion, the findings of the study underscore the critical need for immediate action to eliminate smokeless tobacco use among school going adolescents. The youth are the future of our nation, and their well-being and potential should be our priority. We must work together as a society to adopt tough laws and policies focussed at ensuring tobacco free youth. It is only through collective efforts that we can safeguard their health, academic aspirations, and future contributions to our society.

Author Contribution Statement

All authors have contributed significantly

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