

Introduction

Despite widespread knowledge of the harm caused by smoking, only modest success has been achieved in global tobacco control initiatives. Current estimations of The World Health Organization (WHO) indicates that tobacco consumption causes 3.5 million deaths a year, a figure expected to rise to about 10 million by the year 2030, and, 70% of those deaths will occur in developing countries.

Tobacco use is considered to be one of the chief preventable causes of death in the world. Most people begin using tobacco before the age of 18. Recent studies on trends of tobacco consumption indicate that the smoking prevalence rate among adolescents is rising; and that their age of initiation is lowering. If these patterns continue, tobacco use will result in the deaths of 250 million children and young people alive today, many of them in developing countries. Therefore, adolescents and school-aged children should be a primary focus for intervention strategies. Carefully designed surveys should provide a clear picture of the risk factor behaviors of young and school-aged children which then, can be used to set up more effective and comprehensive tobacco control policies.

In the developing world there is a need for good, scientific sound data about tobacco use patterns. However, in the era of globalization, youth and adolescents are adopting behavior patterns that are comparable from country to country, and regions within a country. Tobacco companies are taking advantage of this situation. They are advertising tobacco products using mass media techniques targeting "the youth of the world".

To counteract the effect of that strategy, there is an urgent need for information that would allow "across" and "within" country comparisons. That would permit the fulfillment of the dual objective of designing preventive strategies targeting "the global youth" while taking into consideration local peculiarities.

The Tobacco Free Initiative (TFI)/WHO was awarded by the United Nations Foundation for International Partnerships (UNFIP) with a grant to initiate a joint project with UNICEF titled "Building alliances and taking action to create a generation of tobacco free children and youth". The aim of the project is to pull together the evidence, technical support, and strategic alliances necessary to positively address the negative impact of tobacco and to encourage and support children and adolescents in leading healthy and active lives free of tobacco. The project focus on developing countries, and will draw upon the combined technical expertise and operational resources of a number of UN agencies, in particular WHO, UNICEF, and the World Bank.

The project consists of three phases. The first phase will focus on harnessing the evidence for action: synthesizing the existing evidence from countries, some of which may participate in subsequent phases; undertaking new areas of research to support actions; and establishing the research-based evidence for developing future actions.

The second phase is the activating phase, where country activating groups, with broad membership, will be formed in each of the participating countries as the coordinating and implementing mechanism at the country level to select and develop the components of a

comprehensive country based approach to addressing tobacco use among children and young people. The third phase will disseminate resources; strength regional capacity to sustain activities; integrating the products and results of the project into ongoing tobacco control work at the national, regional and global levels; transferring technology and experience between countries and regions; and strengthening cooperation and collaboration at all levels.

Seven countries was selected to initially participate in the activating phase (Phase 2) of this project: China, Jordan, Sri Lanka, Fiji, Venezuela, Zimbabwe, and Ukraine. Now more than 40 countries and even more regions within countries, like Lara State (Venezuela), had concluded GYTS.

The Global Youth Tobacco Survey (GYTS)

The GYTS Lara State, Venezuela is a school-based tobacco specific survey which focuses on adolescents grades 6th to 9th. It assesses students' attitudes, knowledge and behaviors related to tobacco use and exposure to environmental tobacco smoke (ETS), as well as youth exposure to prevention curriculum in school, community programs, and media messages aimed at preventing and reducing youth tobacco use. The GYTS provides information on where tobacco products are obtained and used, and information related to the effectiveness of enforcement measures. School surveys are useful tools in gathering data as they are relatively inexpensive and easy to administer, tend to report reliable results, and refusals are significantly lower than in household surveys.

Objectives of the GYTS

The GYTS is a school-based tobacco specific survey that focuses on students age 13-15 years. The objectives of this survey are:

- 1) To document and monitor prevalence of tobacco use including: cigarette smoking, and current use of smokeless tobacco, cigars or pipes.
- 2) To better understand and assess students' attitudes, knowledge and behaviors related to tobacco use and its health impact, including: cessation, environmental tobacco smoke (ETS), media and advertising, minors access, and school curriculum.

The GYTS will attempt to address the following issues: determine the level of tobacco use estimate age of initiation of cigarette use estimate levels of susceptibility to become cigarette smokers exposure to tobacco advertising identify key intervening variables, such as attitudes and beliefs on behavioral norms with regard to tobacco use among young people which can be used in prevention programs assess the extent to which major prevention programs are reaching school-based populations and establish the subjective opinions of those populations regarding such interventions.

Venezuela finished with the 1st GYTS in 1999 and present the pertaining report on January 2000. Given the fact that GYTS Venezuela data is not valid for any particular region within Venezuela, some states decide to undertake GYTS at state level. Here we report on the results from the Lara State (Venezuela) GYTS 2000.