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A STUDY OF PREVALENCE OF SMOKING AMONG MEDICAL DOCTORS IN NEPAL

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

It is indeed a shocking reality that medical doctors who assume the responsibility of not only Curative medicine but also of preventive medicine are themselves a largest group of victims to the habit of smoking. How far is this true as regards to our doctors in Nepal? As an answer to this question, we decided to conduct a survey to find the point prevalence of smoking among medical doctors in Nepal. Using proportionate stratified random sampling technique; we conducted the survey with 250 medical doctors within Katmandu valley as our subjects. After painstaking efforts of over a month, we found this rate to be an average of 15%, that among male doctors being 21% and female doctors being 0%. The data as compared to the worldwide rate of as high as 60% seems to be surprisingly low, especially when the fact, that Nepal is a country with a high percentage of smokers, is remembered. This is, however, a good sign and our doctors should aim to minimize this even further and spread the knowledge of public health among our ignorant Nepalese people.

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INTRODUCTION

Medical doctors are not only clinicians but also public health personnels who are supposed to disseminate awareness among the masses. As regards to the habit of smoking, however, their habit has been accused of being somewhat hypocritical i.e.; preaching something and practicing something else and data from various sources around the globe prove this accusation to be partly true. Every medical doctor knows that smoking is a risk factor for many diseases, most notably many respiratory disorders and almost every cancer. But it has been estimated that the prevalence of smoking among medical doctors is about 60%. How far is this true for Nepal, which has now over 2500 registered doctors practicing in the country? To find a reply to this quest, this survey was conducted.

Literature review could reveal no useful facts. We could not find any such study that has ever been conducted among our doctors.

OBJECTIVES

1. To find out the point prevalence of smoking among medical doctors in Nepal.
2. To find out the age when they started smoking
3. To find out the difference in smoking habit in male and female doctors.
4. To find out if they have ever tried to quit smoking.
5. To find out preventive measures for non-smoking doctors and any measures to quit smoking for smoking doctors.

METHODOLOGY

A community based descriptive study was conducted using proportionate stratified random sampling. Following operational definitions were used.

- (a) Doctor: Person with MBBS or with higher degree and practicing.
- (b) Regular smoker: One who smokes daily, irrespective to the number of cigarettes.
- (c) Occasional smoker: One who doesn't smoke regularly but only on certain special occasions.
- (d) Non-smoker: One who has never had the habit of smoking.
- (e) Doctors who have quit smoking: Doctors who once had the habit of smoking but now have stopped smoking.

Due to problems of economy and logistics, the study had to be confined to Katmandu valley where the major chunk of the country's doctors practice. After obtaining the details of these doctors from the Nepal Medical Council and Nepal Medical Association, they were divided into two strata-viz. males and females.

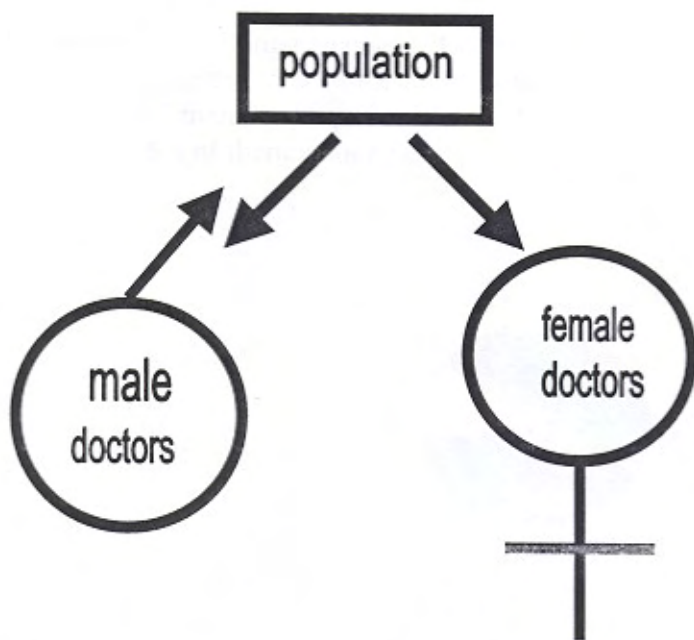


Fig: Diagrammatic presentation of sampling technique

Since the proportion of male and female doctors was 3:1, a total of 150 males and 50 females i.e. 200 doctors in total were taken randomly using the card technique.

Each of the selected doctors was distributed with a pretested questionnaire in a sealed envelope to maintain confidentiality. The questionnaires were collected after a week and collected data was processed and analysed. The questionnaire is presented in Appendix-1.

Point prevalence (PP) of smoking was calculated using following formula.

$$PP = \frac{\text{No. Of doctors who were smoking at the time of study}}{\text{Total no. of doctors taken for study}} \times 100$$

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

As for the description of smoking behavior, 71.58% of the total respondents answered that they have never smoked cigarettes. 15% of the total doctors were found to be smokers. Also it was revealed that 13.20% of them have quit smoking. Among smokers, 9% of the doctors smoke occasionally and only 6% of them smoke regularly.

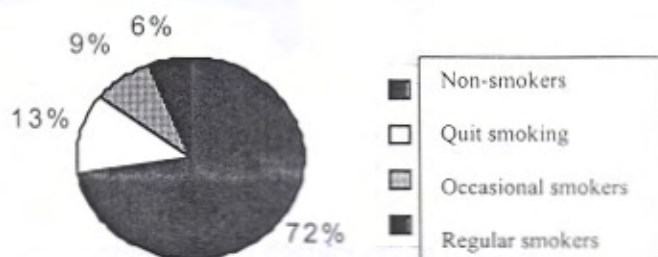


Fig.1. Smoking habit among medical doctors.

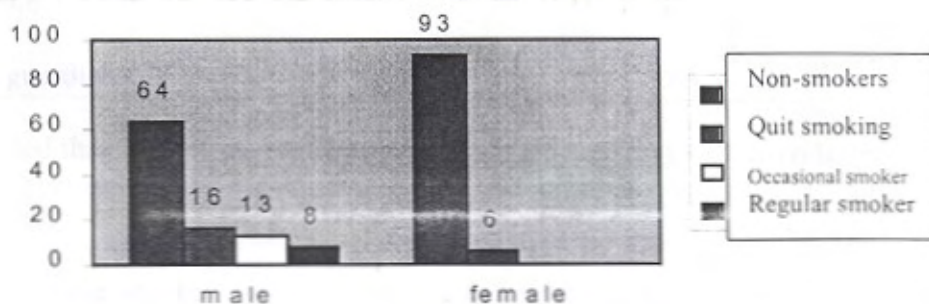


Fig.2. Comparison of smoking habits between male and female doctors.

A comparative study of smoking habit among male and female doctors revealed that 65% of the male doctors were found to be non-smokers while the number that for the female doctors was 93.75%. 16% of male and 6% of female disclosed that they have quit smoking. Not a single female doctor was found to be smoking currently either occasionally or regularly. Among male doctors, 21.61% were found to be smokers, 8% regular and rest occasional.

As for the starting of the smoking habit among regular male doctors, following result was obtained.



Fig.3. Age at which the regular smoking male doctors began to smoke.

The main factor inducing medical doctors to fall in this disgusting habit was found to be no different from that of layman's.

Table.1

FACTORS INDUCING DOCTORS TO START SMOKING	PERCENTAGE
1. To be smart and energetic	67%
2. To relieve tension	33%
3. Peer pressure	0%
4. Imitation from guardian	0%

It was revealed that 1/3rd of the regular smokers started smoking with friends, the other third with guardians themselves and the remaining third on their own.

Most of the regular smokers were found to be heavy smokers. When they were asked about the number of cigarettes they used to smoke per day the result was;

Table.2

	No. of cigarettes smoked per day	Percentage of doctors
1	<5	30
2	5-15	40
3	>15	30

NONE of the regular smokers had ever tried seriously to quit smoking.

Among occasional smokers, most said that they smoke at times of acute stress at one extreme and parties at the other extreme. Others said that they took cigarettes while drinking beer and with friends.

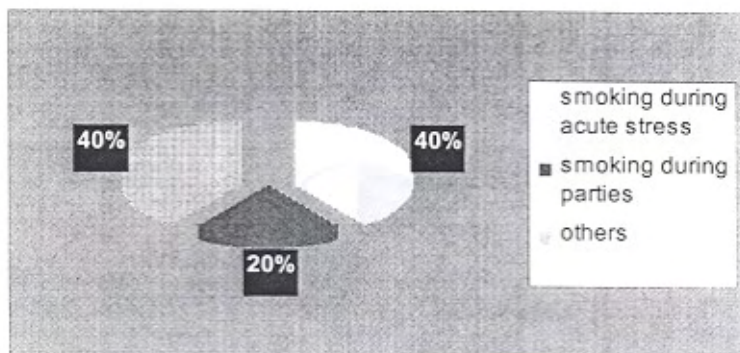


Fig.4. Occasions during which occasional smokers smoke.

About thirteen percent of the total study population had quit smoking and surprisingly all of them did so by their self-motivation, the inspiring factor for most of them being the in-depth knowledge of health hazard.

Most of these subjects had started smoking in the adolescence, the most vulnerable period for falling into such bad habits.

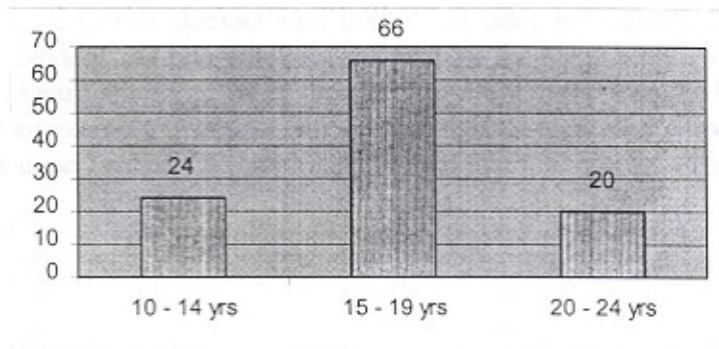


Fig.5. Age at which occasional smokers began smoking.

It was nice to know that most of them quit smoking with maturity.

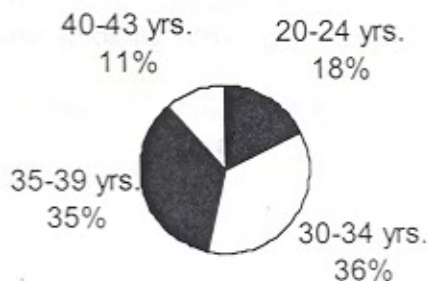


Fig.6. Age at which the ex-smokers quit smoking.

About 73% of the female doctors said that it was their self-conscience that kept them away from smoking. 79% of the non-smoking males gave the same reply, which suggests the same sort of attitude toward smoking. 8% of the males and 6% of the females felt their duty as a medical doctor to set an example in the society. Other answers were awareness o health hazard, disinterest, etc. Some even replied that smoking does not suit their personality.

CONCLUSION

It was a pleasant surprise that the smoking rate among Nepalese medical doctors is very low compared to that of many other countries of the world. Even more pleasant fact is that our female doctors do not smoke despite the data that Nepal is a country with highest rate of female smokers. It is also great to learn most doctors who start smoking early in their life quit smoking later. The battle against smoking seems to be heading towards victory with the great degree of self-conscience and self-motivation our doctors possess. The rate should be further minimized and we will be able to teach the public not by preaching but practice.

APPENDIX-1

Questionnaire

STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL

PREVALENCE OF SMOKING AMONG MEDICAL DOCTORS

Name of the candidate:(optional)

Name of the hospital:

Age:

Sex:

Address:

(1). Which of the following best describes your smoking behavior:

- a) I have never smoked cigarettes (go to question no. 6)
- b) I have quit smoking (go to question no.4)
- c) I smoke occasionally (someday) (go to question no. 3)
- d) I smoke everyday (go to question no. 2)

(2). If you are a regular smoker:

a) When did you start your smoking habit? Age.....Yrs

b) How did you start smoking?

- (1) Peer pressure
- (2) Imitation from guardian
- (3) To be smart and energetic
- (4) To relieve tension
- (5) Others (specify).....

c) With whom did you start your first puff?

- (1) Friends
- (2) Guardian
- (3) Alone
- (4) Others

d) On an average, how many cigarettes do you smoke per day?

..... Cigarettes per day.

e) Have you tried seriously to quit smoking?

- (1) Yes
- (2) No

(3). If you are an occasional smoker, in which (special) occasions do you smoke?

- (a)
- (b)
- (c)
- (d)

(4). If you have quit smoking:

(a) How did you quit smoking?

- (1) Request of friends
- (2) Self motivation
- (3) Request of parents
- (4) Others (specify)

(b) If you were self motivated what was the inspiration to quit smoking?

(c) How old were you when you first started to smoke? Age..... yrs

(d) How old were you when you quit smoking? Age..... yrs

(e) Do you think you will ever resume smoking?

- (1) yes
- (2) no
- (3) never
- (4) not certain

(5). If you are a non-smoker what has kept you away from smoking?

- (a) Self-conscience
- (b) Fear that patient parties will find it out
- (c) Fear that kiths and kins will find it out
- (d) A sense of duty that a medical doctor should set an example in the Society
- (e) Others (specify)

APPENDIX-2

References

- 1) Park, K; Preventive and Social Medicine.
 - 2) Mahajan, B,K; Medical Biostatistics
 - 3) Various journals and reports from NHRC library and newspaper articles.
-

(a)
(b)
(c)
(d)

1. How old were you when you first started to smoke?
2. How old were you when you quit smoking?
3. Do you think you will ever resume smoking?

(a) If you were still in the habit what was the reason for your smoking?
(b) How old were you when you first started to smoke? Age _____
(c) How old were you when you quit smoking? Age _____
(d) Do you think you will ever resume smoking?



(1) yes
(2) no
(3) never
(4) not certain

4. If you are a non-smoker when has been your last cigarette?

(a) not convenient
(b) I am that patient (doctor) if I am a patient
(c) I am that patient (doctor) if I am a patient
(d) A sense of duty (medical doctor should set an example in this society)
(e) Other (specify)

APPENDIX I
References

1. Park, K. Hygienic and Social Medicine
2. Hargrett-Keen, M. Medical Biostatistics
3. ...