

## Practices and attitudes towards tobacco use among the employees of a private organization in Nepal

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### ABSTRACT

Tobacco use is considered as the symbol of adulthood and as a friend during stress and loneliness. It is an important part of Nepali society. With changing time trend, higher education, and awareness campaigns, people have become more conscious regarding tobacco use and its effects on health. Information and technology sector is considered one of the busiest sector. People are working at constant stress. Tobacco use is considered by many people as one of the ways for stress relief. A cross sectional study was conducted in a private organization. The main objective was to understand attitudes and practices of tobacco use among the employees. Among the participants 67% were males and 33% were females. Nearly 95% of employees have experience of tobacco use in any form and 5% of participant reported as tobacco non user. Eighty one percent of the participants were smokers. More than half (52%) use tobacco for coping the stress and 4.3% use during brainstorming. Sixty seven percent were aware of the harmful effects of tobacco on health. In spite of knowledge about harmful effect of tobacco use, it is still prevalent mostly among those who lead stressful life. So continuation and reform of various health education programmes with special target on behavioural changes is much needed.

**Keywords:** Tobacco user, information and technology, awareness, behavioural changes.

### INTRODUCTION

For centuries tobacco use has been very prevalent throughout the world though its form may vary according to geographical location. Smoking is one of the most preferred form of tobacco use throughout the world. According to World Health Organisation, about one in three adults (1.2 billion people) smoke and of these, about 82 per cent lives in low-and middle-income countries. It is estimated that by 2030, one in six or 10 million deaths each year will be due to tobacco related diseases and 70 per cent of them would occur in developing countries.<sup>1</sup> Tobacco is an important part of Nepali society as well whether it is smoking or in smokeless forms like *gutkha*, *khaini*, *surti* (*dry tobacco leaves*), *pan masala*, *supari*, *pan parag*, etc.<sup>1-3</sup> Tobacco is considered as the symbol of adulthood. Now-a-days, people especially in urban areas are conscious about their health.

Various studies conducted showed that factors like age, sex, smoking habits among family members and friends, occupation, attribute to tobacco use.<sup>2-6</sup> Consequently tobacco related health problems will increase with increasing risk factors. Although, people in urban sector with high education have knowledge about the health consequences, they are ignorant to put knowledge into practice. Information and technology (IT) sector is considered one of the busiest sectors.

People working in these sectors are at constant stress and have negligible time for break. In Nepal several prevalence studies have been conducted which are more focused on schools, colleges or rural areas but in modern world, there negligible studies conducted on the people working in IT sector. This study was carried out to add more information from different sector in the study of tobacco use.

Main objective of this study was to understand attitude and practice of tobacco use among the employees of a private organization.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

A cross sectional study was conducted in a private organization of information and technology in June 2011. A semi structured questionnaire was administered to all the employees of the organization. Among all the employees, 112 participated in the study. Participants were given time of a week to fill questionnaire. Exclusion criteria was those not present at the time of data collection and did not give consent for participation.

This survey measured demographic and tobacco use related variables including age, sex, post, tobacco habits among family members, number of sticks per day, age at first dose, knowledge about health problems, etc.

Operational definition used for the study are as follows:

Tobacco user: past user and current users

Current User: those using tobacco at least once a day

Tobacco Non User: never used tobacco till the study period

Past User: tobacco user in the past but currently not using

Occasional user: those who use tobacco at least once a week.

Data was entered in Microsoft excel and analysed by using SPSS version 16. Results were analysed by descriptive statistics and expressed mostly in form of frequency and percentage. Functional relationship various factors was linked statistically with the different levels of tobacco use. Association between various factors are shown by chi square test. Informed verbal consent was taken from organization authority as well as from the participants.

## RESULTS

There were 112 participants among which 75 (67%) were male and 37 (33%) were female. Mean age of participants is 29.5 years (SD±6) and median age is 28 years. Nearly 95% of employee had experience of tobacco use in any form with about 5% of participant as tobacco non user. Majority of (81%) of the participants were smokers.

Association between various variables and different state of tobacco use in shown in Table-1.

**Table-1:** Association between different variables and groups of current users, past users and non- users.

Variables	Groups				P value
	Current User	Past- User	Non- users	Total	
Education Level					
Masters	24	8	0	32	0.03
Bachelor	40	28	4	72	
Intermediate and below	3	3	2	8	
Professional activity					
Administration	9	4	4	17	0.01
Programme /Production management	58	35	2	95	
Working hours					
8hours/day	20	7	1	28	0.35
>8hours/day	47	32	5	84	
Type of job					
Permanent	64	36	6	106	0.65
Temporary	3	3	0	6	

Significance level: if p value is <0.05

Education level of most of the participants was at least bachelors degree and above. Most of the tobacco users were those with bachelors degree (40) followed by masters degree (24).association between various groups of tobacco users and education was statistically significant with P value of <0.05. Most of the respondents, whether current tobacco users or past user had permanent job. Almost two third of the respondents works for more than 8 hours per day. According to professional activities, most of the current users of tobacco were into programme and production management ( p value < 0.05).

Mean age of starting tobacco among current users are higher (mean=18.1yrs,SD±2.99) than among past users (16.9yrsSD±) which is statistically significant (p<0.05). Duration of tobacco use is longer among past users (13.3yrs, SD±6.66yrs) than among current users (11.4,SD±5.22yrs) and the p value is <0.05. Among the smokers number of sticks per day was higher among current users (mean=5.9/day, SD±2.43) than among past users (mean=4.9/day, SD±1.71) which is statistically significant (Table-2).

## Reasons for starting Tobacco use:

Almost half (47.16%) of the respondents started smoking in curiosity. Surprisingly 33% revealed that they started smoking as the symbol of adulthood (33.02%). Rest of the respondents (19.82%) gave the reasons like peer pressure and imitation to others.

## Compliance to practice

In the present study, almost 63% of tobacco users did not read statutory warning before opening the content box. Most of them (79.1%) use tobacco in public places and 55.2% used tobacco in front of children (Table-3).

## Opinion of respondents about effective methods for decreasing tobacco use

Table-4 shows opinion of respondents about effective methods for decreasing tobacco use in the country. Thirty three percent of the respondents said that increasing knowledge about tobacco related legislation among people will decrease tobacco use while 28.6% thought banning tobacco based advertisement and sponsorships (28.6%) as well as community based preventive programmes (28.6%) will be an effective method.

**Table-2:** Association between variables related to tobacco use among current and past users.

Variables	Groups		P value
	Current users	Past users	
	Mean( ±SD)	Mean( ±SD)	
Age at which tobacco started (Years)	18.1( 2.99)	16.9( 2.48)	0.019
Duration of tobacco consumption	11.4(5.22)	13.3(6.66)	0.048
Number of sticks/day (smoking)	5.9 (2.43)	4.9 (1.71)	0.008

SD: Standard deviation; Significance level: if p value is <0.05

## DISCUSSION

In the present study, Mean age of the participants was 29.5 years and majority of the participants were male (67%). This may be because most of the employees have to do technical as well as field work related physical activity. Prevalence of tobacco use among the respondents was high and almost 93% of participants had education level of bachelors degree and above. Education level of tobacco users was lower in accordance with studies revealing that years of formal education influence the lesser probability of starting to or keeping up tobacco use.<sup>7,8</sup>

Working hours in this study did not show any association with tobacco use. Those working for eight hours per day are at equal risk for being tobacco user or non users. But the type of professional activity is seen associated various groups of tobacco use. This revealed that more stressful is the type of responsibility, more the chance of being tobacco user.<sup>9</sup>

When compared between current and past users, the mean age at start and number of sticks of cigarette per day was higher among current tobacco users. But tobacco use duration was longer amongst past users. This study revealed that the participants started smoking as the symbol of adulthood (33.02%). Rest of the respondents (19.82%) gave the reasons like peer pressure and imitation to others. Despite many health promotive and preventive programmes that raise knowledge on the harmful effects of tobacco, until many feel that tobacco

is the instrument self esteem. The stereotype of breaking rules, of the prohibited, the feeling of freedom still attracts many adolescents into experimenting cigarettes and, often, into addiction.<sup>4,10</sup>

Factors that revealed as reasons to not quit included pleasure during tobacco use, never thought of a need, better self esteem. Literature review also list stress relief, habit, lack of will to quit among the main reasons that prevent people from giving up tobacco.<sup>3,4,11,12</sup>

Regarding the practices during tobacco use, this study revealed that most of the participants were reluctant to read statutory warning. Most of the tobacco users were not hesitant to use tobacco in front of children. Literature reviews show that most of the tobacco users did not read statutory warning or tried to find its meaning and if they so understand and encouraged to quit, they were still smokers at the time of study.<sup>13,14</sup> This again strengthen the thought of need of programmes focused on changing habitual practices.

This study also revealed that more than two third of the respondents smoke in public. The government of Nepal has passed an executive restricting tobacco smoking in public places, offices and transportation. But its effective enforcement is still needed. It requires a strong political commitment which is far away from fulfillment.<sup>12</sup>

This study revealed that in opinion of most respondents, effective methods for decreasing tobacco use in the

**Table-3:** Practices during tobacco use among current users.

Variables	Current users	
	number	percentage
Read statutory warning		
Yes	25	37.3
No	42	62.7
Tobacco use in public place		
Yes	53	79.1
No	14	20.9
Tobacco in front of children		
Yes	37	55.2
No	30	44.8

**Table-4:** Opinion of respondents on effective methods for decreasing tobacco use in the country

Variables	Respondents : No. (Percentage)
Increasing Knowledge about tobacco related legislation	37 (33.0)
Banning tobacco based advertisements and sponsorships	32 (28.6)
Community based preventive programmes	32 (28.6)
Raising excise tax	30 (26.8)
Regulating packaging	7 (6.2)
All of above	8 (7.1)

country can be achieved by national programmes focusing on increasing knowledge about tobacco related legislation, banning tobacco based advertisements and sponsorships, community based preventive programmes, raising excise tax and regulating packaging. This shows that most people are still ignorant about restriction on tobacco use in public places and banning on tobacco based advertisement in the country. So it is of much need by the concerned authorities to add programmes to refresh knowledge among public focusing especially in organizations where people work in constant pressure.<sup>1,2,15</sup>

This study concludes that tobacco use and its harmful effect is one of the preventable measures worldwide. But use of its products inspite of knowledge about its harmful effect is still prevalent mostly among those who lead stressful life. So continuation and reform of various health education programmes with special target on behavioural changes is much needed.

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