

Smoking among pharmacy students in Valencia, Spain

To the Editor—In Spain tobacco consumption remains high in comparison to other Western countries, with 38% of the adult population being smokers and 12% being ex-smokers.¹ In this letter we report tobacco consumption among young final-year pharmacy students who possess considerable information on the health risks posed by smoking.

A questionnaire was delivered to 500 students of the Faculty of Pharmacy at the University of Valencia, Spain, who habitually attended classes (23.6% of the total university student population): 309 (61.8%) completed and returned it on an anonymous basis.

The questionnaire employed was the Cornell Medical Index, translated into Spanish. It covered personal data and smoking behaviour, and involved 195 "yes or no" questions addressing aspects of personal health. A transverse study was carried out, dividing the series into smokers, ex-smokers, and those who had never smoked. Frequencies and percentages with 95% confidence intervals were determined for personal smoking data.

Mean age was 22.2 ± 2.8 years (range 17–30). A high proportion were smokers (42.4%) at the time of the study, and 8.4% had been smokers in the past. The mean age of smoking initiation was 15.7 ± 3.3 years. Forty-six percent of women were smokers, versus 35% of men (table). In terms of daily cigarette consumption, 47% reported consuming between 11 and 40 cigarettes/day (table). In this younger population, no one smoked more than 40 cigarettes per day.

Lack of mass media publicity (radio, TV and newspapers) and the low cost of tobacco in Spain generally favour the high incidence of tobacco consumption in this country.^{2,3} In more developed countries, health professionals are progressively abandoning tobacco consumption, in advance of the trend observed among the general population.⁴ In Spain, no such trend is yet apparent: indeed, the incidence of smoking is actually higher among physicians and nursing staff than in the population at large.⁵ Although future

Table Prevalence of smokers, ex-smokers, and never-smokers and cigarette consumption in women and men belonging to a health profession. Frequencies (Fr) and percentages, with 95% confidence interval (CI)

Characteristic	Women (n = 211)		Men (n = 98)		Total (n = 309)	
	Fr	% (95% CI)	Fr	% (95% CI)	Fr	% (95% CI)
Smoking status (n = 309)						
Never-smokers	97	46 (39.2–52.7)	55	56 (46.3–65.9)	152	49 (43.6–54.8)
Ex-smokers	17	8 (4.4–11.7)	9	9 (3.5–14.9)	26	8 (5.3–11.5)
Current smokers	97	46 (39.2–52.7)	34	35 (25.3–44.1)	131	42 (36.9–47.9)
Daily cigarette consumption (n = 131)						
1–10	55	57 (46.8–66.6)	14	41 (24.6–57.7)	69	53 (44.1–61.2)
11–40	42	43 (33.4–53.2)	20	59 (42.3–75.4)	62	47 (38.8–55.9)

trends are difficult to predict, the fact that cigarette consumption remains high among younger health professionals (as reflected in the results of our study) suggests that smoking is still on the rise in this country, particularly among females.

In our study, 46% of women were smokers, compared to 35% of males, while in Valencia, these figures were 46% of females and 70% of males aged 16–44 years.⁶ Other studies have reported a female smoking prevalence of 60% in Mallorca (individuals under age 40), 57% in Gerona (nursing school students), 48.6% in Barcelona (medical students), and 53.1% in Valladolid (university students).^{7–10} According to a World Health Organisation study, 39% of the Spanish female population smokes.¹¹

As observed in other industrialised countries years ago, it seems that young Spanish women with a high educational level have equalled or even surpassed males as regards tobacco consumption. This new social trend may reflect an increased professional and personal independence among women, in addition to the fact that the major multinational tobacco companies have targeted their marketing efforts to this part of the population, thereby inducing and promoting smoking among women.¹²

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