Letters to the Editor

Letters intended for publication should be a maximum of 400 words and 10 references and should be sent to Simon Chapman, deputy editor, at the address given on the inside front cover. Those responding to articles or correspondence published in the journal should be received within six weeks of publication.

An estimate of tobacco taxes paid by children in Japan

To the Editor – In Japan smoking by children under 20 years of age has been prohibited by the Law for Prohibition of Minors from Smoking, which was enacted in 1900. However, this Law has not been observed well by either minors or tobacco sellers as was demonstrated recently in a study by Minowa and Satomi. Smoking rates among Japanese children have not been monitored systematically as in adults, but it has been estimated that the smoking rate is relatively high in the mid- to late-teenage years, and these teens have been paying tobacco taxes for their illegal deeds.

Prevention of smoking in children is an important measure in smoking control. It may be reasonable to allocate some revenues from tobacco taxes paid by children to health education for children. Thus, the amount of tobacco taxes paid by children in Japan was estimated using relevant data included in the so-called "Tobacco White Paper" edited by the Ministry of Health and Welfare (revised version) and some assumptions (table).

The prevalence of smokers 20 years of age and older in 1990 (A) and the average number of cigarettes smoked by smokers of that age (D) were obtained from a nationwide survey conducted by Japan Tobacco Inc. The total population aged 20 years and older in 1990 (B) was obtained from the national census data for 1990. The total amount of tobacco sales in 1990 (H) was obtained from a survey conducted by the Japan Tobacco Association. The amount of tobacco taxes collected in 1990 (I) was obtained from the Finance Ministry.

The number of cigarettes smoked by children (G) was estimated by subtracting the estimated number of cigarettes smoked by adults (E) from the total number of cigarettes sold in Japan (F). The amount of taxes paid by children (J) was estimated by multiplying the percentage of all cigarettes sold in Japan that were smoked by children (G: 11.7%) by the total tobacco tax paid in 1990 (I). The estimated amount of tobacco taxes paid by children in Japan in 1990 was 223.4 billion yen (equivalent to about 2.3 billion US dollars).

Hatziandreou et al. have reported an underestimate of about 35% of tobacco consumption in self-reported surveys in the US, possibly because of the social stigma associated with smoking in the US. In Japan the social stigma associated with smoking does not yet seem as strong as in the US. Thus, if we assume that the amount of tobacco consumption in self-reported surveys is underestimated by 10% in Japan, the number of cigarettes smoked by smokers 20 years of age and older (E) would be 316019 million instead of 284417 million; this would reduce the estimated number of cigarettes smoked by children (G) from 37583 million to 5981 million and the estimated tobacco tax paid by children (J) from 223.4 billion yen to 35.6 billion yen. If even 30% of the estimated 35.6 billion yen in tobacco taxes paid by children is allocated to health education for children, this amount would be equal to the total funding for research grants allocated to a large national health project: the 10-Year Comprehensive Cancer Control Strategy Programmes!

RUKETAMI TONIMAGA

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Table An estimate of tobacco taxes paid by children in Japan in 1990

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>60.5</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>74.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>34397514</td>
<td>4705334</td>
<td>4945045</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>26618700</td>
<td>6726005</td>
<td>9387875</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>42.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>239982 x 10^6</td>
<td>44335 x 10^6</td>
<td>284417 x 10^6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>322000 x 10^6</td>
<td>37583 x 10^6</td>
<td>359583 x 10^6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

H: Total amount of tobacco sales in 1990
I: Tobacco tax in 1990
J: Estimated tobacco taxes paid by children (< 20 years old) (F-E)

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Analysis of coca paste cigarettes

To the Editor – Coca paste (CCP) is the most common form of cocaine used in Peru. It is delivered in small packages. The cost of CCP includes coca leaves, kerosene, sulphuric acid, ammonia, carbonates, and various impurities. It is a mild alkaline material. When smoked, the initial onset of psychoactivity is 8-10 seconds, and the duration of its high is 5-10 minutes. The average acute dose is 60-250 mg of cocaine, which produces peak plasma levels of 300-800 mg/ml, indicating bioavailability of 6-32%. CCP is commonly smoked in tobacco cigarettes. There is no information about how much CCP and nicotine are contained in a typical CCP cigarette (CCPC).

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