
Health Issues And Effects Of Tobacco On Youth In Australia

Introduction

The purpose of the inquiry was to investigate a drug-related issue affecting the health and wellbeing of young people in Australia. The drug I based my inquiry on was tobacco. Tobacco is the preparation nicotine-rich leaves which are cured by a process of drying and fermentation for smoking or chewing. It is a drug which negative impacts the body massively in the long and short term. My purpose for the inquiry was to research the long- and short-term negative impacts on the body, as well as what can be done to reduce these impacts. As well as researching these factors, I also researched why teens feel influenced to use tobacco as well as the social, economic and environmental impacts tobacco has on teenagers.

The reasons teenagers use tobacco

Teenagers feel influenced to use tobacco due to a variety of reasons. Tobacco acts as both a stimulant and a sedative. To teenagers, a stimulant is seen as a way to increase happiness due to incorrect knowledge given on the substance. This belief then leads to teenagers believing that it helps with stress and relaxation. With these perceived positives, tobacco is seen as a positive reinforcement. A reason why teenagers may feel influenced to use tobacco is due to peer influence. This is the most common reason for tobacco use within children and teens; especially girls. If the child has seen peers smoke, there is an increased likelihood that the child will begin to smoke as well. By friends being able to smoke together, it gives the children a sense of belonging within the friendship group. This is similar to adult smoking. If teenagers see adults/parents smoking, the child is more likely to smoke. By seeing the child's 'role model' smoking, it can be seen as a positive/normal behaviour. From this, smoking can be perceived as grown up and mature. Advertising and media also influence the use of tobacco. For advertisers, tobacco companies aim their marketing towards teens and children. This is done as regular smokers begin smoking in their teenage years; which makes them the key demographic. Actors in movies also have a key influence. Teenagers and children look up to actors who smoke in movies and television. By the children seeing their 'idols' smoke, it increases the likelihood of teenagers trying to imitate their behaviour. Statistics which prove these perspectives is that 90% of smokers begin before the age of 19. This shows how the influence of adults can affect children. Tobacco is not only an addictive substance; it also increases the likelihood of teenagers experimenting with other illegal substances. Studies show that teenagers who smoke, are three times more likely to use alcohol, eight times more likely to use marijuana and 22 times more likely to use cocaine. This proves that if the encouragement of tobacco is continued, the addiction of other drugs is also increased. These factors show why teenagers feel the need to use tobacco.

The negative impacts on the body

Tobacco impacts the body massively in a negative way. It affects majority of the bodily systems. Overall, diseases caused by long term smoking include; cancer of the lung, mouth, nose,

tongue, heart disease and stroke, ulcers in the digestive system, osteoporosis and hip fracture, poor blood circulation in the feet and hands, type 2 diabetes and rheumatoid arthritis. Tobacco impacts the respiratory system as the impairment of the lungs clearance system leads to a build-up of poisonous substances, resulting in an impact of lung irritation and damage. This damage can permanently destroy the air sacs of the lungs. The circulatory system is impacted massively as the effects of this system can lead to death and heart attacks. With using tobacco, it creates 'stickier' blood which is prone to clotting. This clotting can cause damage to the arteries; contributing to the factor of atherosclerosis. (Atherosclerosis refers to the build-up of fatty deposits on the artery walls.) This action which takes place in the circulatory system leads to an increased risk of a stroke and a heart attack due to the blockages of the blood supply. The effects on the immune system create more severe and longer lasting illnesses. By using tobacco, it makes the immune system less effective at fighting off infections as time goes on. As this process continues, it also continues to weaken the immune system making your body more vulnerable to autoimmune diseases. The musculoskeletal system is also affected as tobacco usage reduces bone density which can then later develop into osteoporosis. It makes fractures hard to heal and recover from as the oxygen delivery and cellular function can't reach the site of the fracture. In general, these systems all lead to affects such as; higher risk of blindness, premature wrinkling of the skin and taste, gum disease and a reduced ability to smell. With tobacco use, all of these systems have long term effects on the body in a negative way.

The short term affects for tobacco use can affect an individual suddenly, or over time. By having these affects, it also decreases the individual's standard of living. It affects the respiratory system as it causes irritation to the larynx (voice box) and trachea (windpipe). This can be due to the narrowing and swelling of the lung airways and excess mucus in lung passages. From this occurring, it leads to reduced lung function and breathlessness. Due to the narrowing and swelling, it can also lead to an increased risk of a lung infection and symptoms such as coughing and wheezing. Tobacco affects the circulatory system as it increases the individuals' blood pressure and heart rate. At the time of inhaling the drug, there will be a decrease in skin temperature due to the tightening of the blood vessels in the skin. During exercise, less oxygen will be carried to the blood. This is due to the reduced blood flow to the extremities (fingers and toes). With tobacco affecting the immune system, it leads to an increased susceptibility to infections such as pneumonia and influenza. This is due to the drug lowering the individual's levels of protective antioxidants (eg: vitamin C) in the blood. The use of tobacco impacts a person's use of physical activity massively. The musculoskeletal system is impacted as it tightens certain muscles. With this tightening, it leads to increased joint activity and chronic lower back pain.

By smoking tobacco, it not only effects the individual short term, but it also effects the people surrounding you. This is called second hand smoke. Second hand smoke is the inhaling of another's cigarette. The short-term effects on someone who has second hand smoke include numerous health problems in infants and children. These problems include more frequent and severe asthma attacks, respiratory and ear infections and sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS). Second hand smoke also affects newborns as smoking during pregnancy results on more than 1000 infant deaths annually. These short-term effects on the body and second hand smoke, massively effect the living of the individual taking the drug and the people surrounding the user.

Social, economic and environmental impacts on teenagers

Tobacco affects the lives of teenagers in several ways. Tobacco can socially, economically and environmentally change their lives. Social impacts have many factors which contribute to the increased usage of tobacco. A massive contributor is social smoking. Social smoking usually occurs at parties or in social situations. In these situations, sometimes alcohol is present. If it is present, the alcohol can also influence your decision making on where you decide to take tobacco. By using tobacco in social situations, it also impacts other teenagers. Second hand smoke is toxic and has been proven to lead to many health problems. By smoking around non-smokers, it puts yourself and your peers in danger. If an individual wants to become a non-smoker, it can be difficult to keep a relationship with friends. It can change your relationship if you want to quit but your friends don't. By being smoke free, the individual would have to avoid social situations as it could make the person crave tobacco. However, many continue to smoke with friends as the individual doesn't want to grow apart from the friends who do smoke. The economic effects of tobacco not only effect the user but also the world globally. WHO (World Health Organisation) estimates that globally, smoking causes over US\$500 million in economic damage each year. The impact on the individual is that it can create a financial debt for teenagers to take into adulthood. As the product is addictive, the purchase of the product would occur more frequently. With teenagers going into adulthood, accessibility becomes easier; creating an increase in addiction. With smoking, there are many environmental impacts which negatively impact the pollution on Earth. Littering of cigarette butts isn't just a nuisance, they are also toxic waste. They contain chemicals that contaminate our waterways, ground soil and they also harm wildlife. By teens smoking it effects the environment. The discarded lit cigarettes can cause fires, which can damage homes and land. These factors are what contributes to the social, economic and environmental impacts of teenagers who use tobacco.

Recommendations

1. (For parents): To set a good example.

Teen smoking is most common amongst teens whose parents smoke. If the parent smokes, then try and quit. The parent should try and stop smoking in front of the teen and shouldn't leave out smoking materials around the home. By doing this, it makes it harder to access. If the parent does smoke, the best way to set a good example would be to explain how unhappy smoking makes them and how difficult it is to quit. By explaining this, it shows your child the negative impacts from a 'role models' personal perspective. The parents' opinion and perspective would be valued more.

2. Counselling from coaching staff about smoking. Awareness lessons to show the negative impacts on using tobacco. (influences teens decision):

By having awareness lessons, it allows for a wide range of teenagers to get knowledge on the dangerous substance. By showing disturbing photos, videos and information it may change the teenager's perspective and opinion on using tobacco. By having an expert talk about the issue, it allows the justification that these effects really can happen.

3. Higher taxation rates. Making tobacco products less affordable by raising taxes on tobacco products:

By increasing the tax rates on tobacco products, access is limited to teenagers as they can't afford the product. By having this limited access, it limits use. This will also decrease the amount adults spend on tobacco as well as they wouldn't want to pay the

high taxation number for tobacco.

Conclusion

Overall, I believe tobacco is an extremely dangerous substance which shouldn't be inhaled by teenagers. In my personal opinion, I believe the parents have a massive influence on whether their child smokes or not. If a parent is a regular smoker, the act of smoking is going to be put into a positive light. By parents smoking, it makes the child believe that there is nothing wrong with it. This is shown with the statistic that 90% of smokers begin to start before the age of 19. If a smoker begins before the age of 19, it shows that someone over the legal age is purchasing the product for them. My opinion is that parents need to warn their children about the dangers of smoking and well as the negative effects it can have on the body.

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