

Smoking patterns in Central Europe

Education as a determinant factor of smoking and quitting

Authors: Narine K Movsisyan, Ondrej Sochor, Eva Kralikova, Renata Cifkova, Hana Ross, Francisco Lopez-Jimenez



The number of premature deaths from coronary heart disease (CHD), for which tobacco use is a major risk factor, varies dramatically across Europe. These deaths can be prevented by improving the quality of and access to healthcare, on one hand, and by implementing effective public health interventions to promote healthy behaviours and reduce the risk factors such as smoking, on the other. Many studies have examined the socioeconomic variations in smoking and quitting rates across the European

region; however, data from Central and East European countries, where the tobacco burden is especially high, are sparse. This study aimed to assess the patterns in current and past smoking prevalence based on cross-sectional data from a Central European urban population sample. Data from 2160 respondents aged 25-64 years in Brno, Czech Republic were collected in 2013-2014 to assess the prevalence of cardiovascular risk factors, including smoking status. Relationships between current and past smoking and demographic and socioeconomic variables are examined.

- **Main result 1:** The prevalence of current and past smoking was 23.6 and 31.3 % among men and 20.5 and 23.2 % among women, respectively
- **Main result 2:** Education reliably predicted smoking and quitting rates in both genders



The prevalence of current and past smoking was 23.6 and 31.3 % among men and 20.5 and 23.2 % among women, respectively. Education was the most stable and salient predictor of current and past smoking while the other correlates differed by gender in the study population. These gender-related differences in determinants of smoking and past smoking prevalence can possibly be explained by different social and family roles of men and women in the study population.

Facts/Policy lessons

- Interventions to increase cessation rates and reduce smoking prevalence need to be gender-specific and carefully tailored to the needs of the disadvantaged groups of the population, especially the less well-off young adults.
- Future research should evaluate equity-oriented outcomes of such interventions and policies.

Among men, being unemployed was associated with greater odds of smoking and lower likelihood of quitting; the likelihood of quitting also increased with age. Among women, marital status (being married) decreased the odds of current smoking and increased the odds of quitting. Quit ratios were the lowest in the youngest age group (25-34 years) where quitting was more strongly associated with middle income than with higher education.

Our findings suggested that the differences in smoking/quitting rates start to accumulate already in early adulthood. Reducing smoking among less advantaged young adults should become a priority and be addressed by policy measures, such as tobacco taxation. Gender-specific interventions might be warranted to increase quitting in middle-age smokers. It is also important that future research will evaluate equity-oriented outcomes of such interventions and policies. Finally, further research using a standardized approach is needed to better understand the divergent trends in current and past smoking in Central and Eastern Europe.

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CONTACT:

Room 3.07, School of Economics Building
Middle Campus, University of Cape Town
Rondebosch 7700, Cape Town
South Africa

Phone +27 (0)21 650 3608
Email nicole.vellios@uct.ac.za
www.tobaccoecon.uct.ac.za
www.untobaccocontrol.org/kh/taxation/

