Smoking Cessation Barriers in Kathmandu, Nepal

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**Background:**

Nepal has the highest mortality rate from chronic lung diseases globally. The World Bank reports that over 37 percent of Nepalese citizens over 15 years old currently use tobacco products. Yet, the smoking epidemic is still under-researched in Nepal. This research seeks to understand the Nepalese peoples’ attitudes towards smoking and the main barriers to quitting, in order to develop sustainable, culturally appropriate smoking cessation programs in Nepal.

**Methods:**

Participants were recruited from outpatient multispecialty clinics at the Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital in July 2023. Participants (n= 250) met eligibility requirements if they were 18+ years of age and had used a tobacco product in the last 15 years. Participation was voluntary; both verbal and written consent was obtained. The 46-question survey was administered verbally using interpreters and answers were entered into data management application Qualtrics. Data analysis was conducted using R statistical analysis software, and results are reported as numbers and proportions.

**Findings:**

Participants included 231 (92.4%) males, 18 (7.2%) females, and one participant who identified with neither (0.4%). Of the participants, 36 were 18-24 years old (14.4%), 82 were 25-39 (32.8%), 64 were 40-54 (25.6%), and 68 were 55-89 (27.2%). Approximately 69% of participants were married, and 17% didn’t attend any formal schooling. A vast proportion (92.4%) of participants believed smoking was very harmful to their health. A majority of participants had cravings to smoke tobacco products, with 29.6% having an overpowering strong urge, and 26.4% having some urge to smoke. The main barriers people reported preventing them from successful smoking cessation were addiction (31.6%), the fact that everyone around them smoked (24.4%), and previous failed attempts at quitting smoking (22%). People reported they can’t stop smoking because they do not have the willpower to quit (28%), smoking cessation is not particularly important to them (27%), and because it’s too difficult to quit when everyone around them smokes (24%).

The large male demographic in our study supports previous results that men are three times as likely to smoke as women. Most Nepalese participants had understanding that smoking is harmful to their health. However, the strong addiction to smoking and urge for tobacco products provides a large barrier for successful smoking cessation. Moreover, the social pressure of participants interpersonal circle smoking creates an extreme challenge for people to quit using tobacco products.

**Interpretation:**

The results of our cross-sectional study suggest that creating public health interventions that focus on smoking cessation tools to help people with their craving and addiction to tobacco, along with reducing social pressure could create sustainable progress for the smoking epidemic in Nepal.

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