

Stopping A Legal Killer: Youth Smoking and Prevention

Louis Erazo

Introduction: Ascertaining the Issue and Addressing the Problem

As we progress into a more sophisticated and knowledgeable future, it is no wonder that our prosperity and health are first on our list of priorities. By simply looking at the longevity people have in today's world, one can see something that was unfathomable less than one hundred years ago. In this proposal, an issue is addressed that deals on many levels. It is an issue that touches everyone, whether one is directly involved or not. It is an issue that lives in every community around the world and affects more people than most realize. So as we advance into an increasingly foreseeable future, where our standard of success rises higher and higher toward perfection, it is ironic how we allow such an issue slip past our view and remain forever in our periphery.

It is this, the issue of smoking, which has stood the test of time and has raised all of these concerns. The importance of addressing this blemish on society's face is something that can no longer be ignored. The purpose of this proposal is to effectively state a solution to the problems of youth smoking and illegal sale of tobacco, issues that have been pushed aside in the minds of so many for too long.

Background Information: Linking the Past With the Present

Prologue

Cigarette smoking is ubiquitous. It seems today that everywhere we turn we see media channeling or promoting their attention on smoking. How this effects society in America and others around the world is substantial. Over recent years, prominence of smoking has been seen to be on the upswing and this in effect not only influences adult smokers, but youths as well. However, the issue of youth smoking is not something new. There have been many ways in which the problem of underage smoking has been addressed, such as governmental legislation and undercover surveillance, but often times, these methods are overlooked and not enforced.

To provide a picture of the magnitude of the problem, it was estimated that underage smokers consumed 924 million packs of cigarettes in 1998 (U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, 188). A number as large as this will be certain to raise eyebrows, but as we have seen from the past, most times it does not. A prime example of the ignorance shown toward smoking is given by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention who state that over 2 million deaths in the 5-year period from 1995 through 1999 were attributable to cigarette smoking (Heinrich 1). This total lack of adherence is shocking.

But first, to begin to assess and fully understand what we are dealing with, knowledge of tobacco and how exactly it became so popular is necessary to achieve a meaningful solution and ultimately effective proposal.

Tobacco: A Self Portrait

Exactly how tobacco gained so much influence and popularity is uncertain. There was never a single moment in time when everyone all at once decided that they should take up smoking cigarettes. This is why tracing the exact origin of influence is hard to do. However, when one looks at the past, hints of causing factors can be seen that still create problems in

today's issues. For example, Joel Spitzer, a former smoker, writes about how smoking cigarettes started to become part of everyday life and emerge itself into mainstream society:

It was cheap, well under 50 cents a pack. It was readily available. You could smoke it anywhere, anytime you wanted. It was respectable. Your friends did it, your relatives did it, your co-workers did it, your boss did it, and your doctor even did it. There was no social stigma attached. To the contrary, you were viewed as sophisticated, smart, tough, enlightened, or even healthy and robust as you deeply sucked in drag after drag... (“When Smoking Choice”).

Before the Surgeon General's Warning came out in 1964, cigarette smoking was not considered harmful or unacceptable, at all. Smoking was done by everyone and anyone and it could be due to this reason that we have the issue of underage smoking today.

But what exactly is tobacco and what does it do to the body of a smoker? Why is this substance so harmful to people, and if it is, why don't smokers just stop the deadly habit and quit smoking? This question can be addressed on many levels, but from any approach, there are basic facts that underlie everything that must be covered.

Tobacco: What It Is and How It Affects the Body

Tobacco leaves are grown from the ground as an agricultural crop. In the United States , tobacco is grown in the warm climate of the South, in particular, North Carolina . Huge tobacco franchises started by entrepreneurs such as James Duke and J.R. Reynolds still exist today whose high fortunes have been made by distributing cigarettes and other tobacco products all around the world. Tobacco is usually smoked and one of the main addictive ingredients found in tobacco is nicotine. Nicotine works by stimulating the nervous system and eventually the body becomes

fond of this lethal chemical. As time goes on, the body of the smoker wants more and more nicotine which ultimately leads to addiction. Ironically, however, if it had not been for nicotine, many of the basic discoveries in the field of the autonomic nervous system might have been delayed by decades (Ginzel, 101).

Besides nicotine, tobacco smoke, when ingested into the lungs, contains hundreds of damaging chemical substances that condense to form cigarette tar. When the lungs are constantly exposed to these dangerous chemicals, they must work harder than normal to function adequately. The stress that is put on the lungs can lead to disease and irreparable damage. Emphysema and chronic bronchitis are two of the most commonly found diseases of the lungs caused by smoking. Emphysema is a disease characterized by a loss of lung tissue elasticity and breakup of the air sacs, impairing the lungs' ability to obtain oxygen and remove carbon dioxide (Insel, 172). Chronic bronchitis, as some people may experience due to allergies, colds, etc., is the persistent, recurrent inflammation of the bronchial tubes.

In accordance with these diseases are both long- and short-term effects. From the first puff of a cigarette, the body immediately reacts to the chemicals. Nicotine causes a short-term increase in blood pressure, heart rate, and the flow of blood to the heart ("Tobacco"). As a result, this can often lead to premature coronary heart disease (CHD) (Brodish, 8). Long-term effects of smoking have been documented to cause chronic lung disease, stroke, blindness, as well as cancer of the lungs, larynx, esophagus, mouth, and bladder. Researchers have identified over forty chemicals in tobacco smoke that cause cancer in humans and animals ("Tobacco").

Other forms of tobacco, such as cigars and pipes, are not ingested and therefore do not cause the internal cancer that cigarettes do, but that does not make them any less dangerous.

Cigars, for example, are whole tobacco leaves dried up and rolled. Large cigars contain as much as a pack of tobacco smoke in them and may take 1-2 hours to smoke. The nicotine is taken into the body through the lips and gums and this often leads to oral cancer. Recent studies have shown a rise in cigar use among teenagers and this has raised warning flags because nicotine addiction almost always develops in the teen or young adult years. These flags, however, have made some very powerful changes in the prevention of youth smoking. For example, the Federal Trade Commission in June of 2000 announced an agreement to put warning labels on cigar boxes, 34 years after warning labels first appeared on cigarette packages (Insel, 173). This proves that although there is often a rise in the number of new smokers each year, the efforts of anti-smoking legislators and activists are not in vain. Differences are made and to achieve the goal of worldwide prevention, we must make progress step-by-step.

The Uphill Battle of Addiction

Besides internal damage such as disease and cancer, there is still a missing key element that every long-term smoker has to deal with: addiction. Addiction to nicotine is both physical and mental. In the many ways that nicotine affects one's organs, it equally affects one's mind. In the same way that you may associate different times of day with specific activities – such as showering when you wake up in the morning – certain situations and events become very strongly associated with smoking in your subconscious (Giving Up Smoking). This is what is known as a Pavlovian reaction. Famous psychologist Ivan Pavlov discovered that if he rung a bell before feeding his dogs, eventually, the ringing of the bell alone would make the dogs salivate. This reaction is not unlike what happens to smokers when they first wake up, or when they are experiencing stress, happiness, or anything else they associate with smoking. While

breaking the physical addiction to nicotine is hard, breaking the psychological addiction is even harder.

Besides the psychological cause for addiction to smoking, there is yet another. That of which, is additives in cigarettes. Though they may deny it, companies such as Marlboro put additives into their tobacco to ensure that smokers of their cigarettes keep buying and wanting more of only their brand of cigarettes. Additives affect the body on the chemical level, much like a stronger form of nicotine. Companies such as Winston, for example, advertise against this with their “No Bull” slogan showing that they do not use additives in their cigarettes. Either way, additive or not, smoking cigarettes remains highly addictive with constant use and the harmful tolls it takes on the body do not change in either circumstance.

Tobacco: How It Affects the Public

Smoking tobacco not only affects the smoker, but those around them as well. In 1993, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency designated environmental tobacco smoke (ETS) a Class A carcinogen – an agent known to cause cancer in humans (Insel, 174). This distinction put ETS into the same category as other notorious cancer causing agents, such as asbestos. Studies show that those who inhale this secondhand smoke often develop a cough, headaches, nasal discomfort and eye irritation. Children exposed to secondhand smoke are twice as likely to develop these symptoms and in turn, become smokers themselves. This is yeah another key factor that gets overlooked by the smoker. A smoker does not realize, or at least consider, that their actions will in effect influence the lives of their children and friends who do not smoke. Smoking is not only a disgusting habit, but is inconsiderate to those around you who do not smoke.

How Cigarettes Are Obtained By Minors

By now it is clear that youths obtain tobacco illegally, but how? There are many ways in which an underage smoker can obtain tobacco and with constant innovations of technology, the methods by which to obtain are becoming more universal and easy. Youths most commonly obtain tobacco from noncommercial sources such as friends, siblings, and parents. After the first cigarette, those who continue to smoke will typically rely upon same-aged friends as their steady source of cigarettes and tobacco (U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, 183). Eventually, however, their source will cost a price. Once a dependence on tobacco is established among these young smokers, the need for a reliable source is a leading reason that these underage smokers will end up purchasing their own tobacco while still underage. This is usually done with the same-aged friend, but this time, the tobacco is no longer free. The number of youths that purchase their own tobacco varies from community to community and depends on how difficult it is to obtain tobacco in that given area. Also, by already willing to buy tobacco underage, the odds of the smoker to buy tobacco when he/she becomes of age are even higher.

Another culprit in underage tobacco distribution is the all too familiar internet. The Jenkins Act of 1949 requires by law any person selling cigarettes for profit in interstate commerce to report to State tobacco tax administrators the name and address of the persons to whom the cigarettes were shipped and the brand and quantities shipped (United States). However, this is not always done and ways around this have been forged. The internet is a slippery slope and noncompliance is much easier to do via this method than anything else. Children of any age can access websites that sell tobacco to anyone who will pay and this is a very easy source of cigarettes. Also, youths will seek retailers that are out of state in order to obtain more cigarettes for a cheaper price.

Another area of youth access to tobacco is at the most basic level: the stores themselves. Older siblings given money to buy their younger brother/sister cigarettes, vending machines, and underage in store selling are just a number of ways youths can obtain tobacco. In a study, undercover minors are taken up as subjects in compliance tests for stores to see whether or not retailers will sell tobacco to them. Results of compliance rate studies have shown that girls are more often sold tobacco than are boys and that older youths are more successful than younger youths (U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, 1985).

In New Brunswick, Canada, for instance, the percentage of retailers who obeyed the law of not selling to underage was only 42% (“Underage Smokers”). This percentage compares miserably with Canada's national average of 70% and is a prime example of the lack of concern for today's youth in some communities. Although efforts to prevent this type of ‘epidemic’, if you will, of underage distribution of tobacco have continued, it is the initial lack of consideration that most aptly affects young children to take up smoking in these ignorant communities around the world. Some have argued that even if compliance tests and such did put a curve on youth access to tobacco, there would still be other ways by which one could obtain. This may be true, but doing something is better than doing nothing at all. And as we will see next, these concerted and dedicated efforts are not in vain.

Steps to Prevention: Examples in Action

Although there is much non-adherence to laws and regulations whose aim is to prevent smoking, there are a few that have proven to be effective. One of the ways that smoking has recently been kept away from the public is the banning of smoking in public places, such as restaurants and bars. Policies such as these have been enacted in the United States, England,

Australia , and New Zealand . For example, in Glasgow , England , the city's licensing board made a condition of granting a children's license that areas where children are present should be completely smoke-free (“Bid Keep Kids Away”). Smoking bans such as these not only help in avoiding secondhand smoke, but also effectively reduce passive smoking in non-smokers. Smoke-free policies send a strong and direct message to youths that not smoking is the norm while also greatly reducing the chances of youth smoking and temptation.

Another key tactic of prevention is the price of tobacco. Price is one of the strongest influences on whether or not one buys tobacco and it greatly affects youth's initial probability of purchasing tobacco. Typically, an increase in price of tobacco products of 10% causes a fall in smoking of 4% in adults and 6% in children (Jamrozik, 760). This increase in price can be taken to show that smoking is not only bad for the body, but bad for one's wallet, as well. What advocates of anti-smoking need to remember is that youth's do not have a lot of money to go around, so attacking the price of tobacco can greatly aid prevention on a number of levels.

Public education and awareness, though something that seems to have been around for years now, can still be used as an essential weapon to promote youth smoking prevention. Educational resources explaining in detail about the harms of smoking can be very crucial in stopping younger children from smoking. Mass media campaigns need to not only be informative, but attractive to an audience as well. The issues that are brought up need to challenge the public's idea about smoking and show that the issues raised are still alive and pertinent in today's world. Mounting evidence has proven that the best way to reduce smoking in young people is to reset prevailing norms about smoking and to reduce the prevalence of smoking in adults (Jamrozik, 760).

Also, one of the most popular ways youths are influenced by adults to smoke aside from actually seeing them do it is in movies. As young children, it is easy to look up to one's favorite action hero in a movie and want to be like him/her. However, when this hero is seen smoking a cigar or cigarette while playing a role in a film, this seemingly harmless appearance can go all wrong. Smoking in films promotes a positive image of smoking to youths. Although there is not much that can legally be done to stop this from happening, better awareness on the part of the child's parents should be taken so as to prevent their child from viewing such negatively influential films.

Proposed Solutions: Steps Toward Victory

Based on already adopted strategies and programs initiated in the United States and other countries around the world, there seems to be an effective approach to youth smoking prevention that has been proven to work. Although some efforts have failed, there are still key 'pressure points' by which to attack smoking and successfully collapse youth smoking. These points are: regulation, education, and prosecution. The proposed goal to stop youth smoking is to create a complete and effective awareness program using these points concurrently.

Pressure Points of Success: Regulation, Education and Prosecution

We start by enforcing stricter regulations of tobacco. It has already been seen that public places, such as restaurants and bars, are going through a revamping of their smoking policies, particularly, with the banning of smoking in many public places. The importance of maintaining this initiative cannot be stressed enough. By prohibiting public smoking in restaurants and bars, and enforcing a stricter penalty for non-adherence, there are many people that can be touched and benefited from this. Not only does the public establishment become free of its dank, musty,

smoker-smell, but potential smokers are deterred from even starting up the disgusting habit.

Children do not have the opportunity to be exposed constantly to seeing smokers and this breaks the idea that the smoker is the 'role model', the 'cool guy', the 'person you want to be'.

With the prohibition of public smoking in accordance with public education in schools, children can be kept safe from the allure of smoking at school and out of school. New programs must be attractive to young children and a general audience with better governmental funding for school based education on smoking, more sophisticated ad campaigns and media publicity. All of these things can fully affect young children around the world, thus preventing smoking at an early age. Children will then become accustomed to promotions against smoking. Eventually, this will become the norm and the mere thought of smoking for children will not even be an issue.

Finally, publicly stating an issue and getting the world's attention on it can have more of an effect on people than most know. This is exactly what gets done with the prevention of underage smoking and the illegal distribution of tobacco to minors with this proposal. In 1998, 48 states in the Master Settlement Agreement settled lawsuits against major tobacco companies over tobacco related health-care costs and imposed restrictions on the marketing of tobacco products ("Special Reports: Tobacco"). Efforts to limit this have been seen in the compliance rate tests across the country and they have had an effect on the sale of tobacco to minors. However, in some towns, illegal distribution still goes on. By creating laws that are more specific and carry a heavier penalty, one will think twice about the consequences one can get into by selling cigarettes to minors. This will in effect reduce underage smoking and even scare minors away from attempting to buy their own cigarettes.

Conclusion: Moving Forward With a Healthy Environment

As stated throughout this proposal, the importance of addressing youth smoking and establishing ways in which it can be prevented is vital to long-term success. Only by acknowledging the facts about smoking and what harm it actually does to the human body can we form an effective means of prevention. That is what this proposal should have helped establish in the minds of those who have read it. An enormous benefit to humanity can be accomplished in taking action against smoking and the only way that this can be done is by not waiting any longer. Taking action against youth smoking today and can prevent the deaths of millions of children that die year after year due to tobacco. We have one chance to make a difference in this world and that difference can be made only by you. Promote anti-smoking establishments and youth smoking prevention programs worldwide and realize that the smoker's world is your world too. Stop the killing. Stop smoking now.

Background Section: Statistics and Graphs

Chart 1:

Source: Jamrozik, Konrad. "ABC of Smoking Cessation: Population Strategies to Prevent Smoking" Inverse relation between real price of cigarettes and consumption in Canada , 1989-95. Adapted from Jha et al (Curbing the epidemic: governments and the economics of tobacco control . Washington , DC : World Bank, 1999)

Chart 2:

Source: Jamrozik, Konrad. "ABC of Smoking Cessation: Population Strategies to Prevent Smoking". Effectiveness of sustained public education campaigns in reducing smoking in US state of Massachusetts . Adapted from Biener et al (BMJ 2000; 321:351-4)

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