

# Psychosocial Characteristics of Smokers: A Case Study of Student Smokers in Saudi Arabia

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to fill the gap in knowledge about the psychosocial characteristics of college student smokers. The sample consisted of 25 male students in Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University. The age of the participants ranged from 19 to 23 years, with the mean age of 20.82. Using case study methodology, socioeconomic and psychological assessments were administered. The results revealed that 56% of students struggled with academic stress, which was a strong reason for smoking and increased number of cigarettes per day. 50% of students smoke because of the feelings of anxiousness and meaninglessness. 48% of the students smoke because of curiosity, and 36% because of isolation and living away from their parents. 22% of students tried to quit but relapsed. The study initial psychological evaluation compared smokers' disorder in multiple dimensions, daily smoking, substance abuse, lack of exercise, exam anxiety, guilt, cognitive dysfunction, behavioral issues, images, interpersonal relationship, and sensation. However, it was concluded that smoking influences students with low academic performance while it is noticeably associated with academic stress, and smoking cessation and prevention programs are needed to improve students' academic performance and overall well-being.

## Keywords:

Smoking, Psychosocial Characteristics, Case study, Student Smokers.

*Article Received: 18 October 2020, Revised: 3 November 2020, Accepted: 24 December 2020*

## Introduction

Smoking is one of the outstanding global public health problems. It is also a preventable cause of smoking-related diseases and overall mortality (Unubol & Saya, 2019). Cigarette smoking is the leading cause of early death in world (Herbert, Foulds, & Fife-Schaw, 2001). Although cigarette smoking among adults has steadily declined over the past decade, smoking among college students has risen sharply (Von, Ebert, Ngamvitroj, Park, & Kang, 2005). Nearly 70% of smokers want to quit smoking. However, few of them succeed, and among those who do, most need five to seven attempts before they finally get rid of the habit. Therefore, this serious problem suggests a need for more attention towards smoking behavior and its consequences and a smoking cessation and prevention programs are needed to control the negative impacts of smoking on individual life. Although many studies have demonstrated increased rates of smoking and nicotine dependence among individuals with anxiety

disorders, there is a limited literature that has prospectively examined smoking behavior (Vitoria, Salgueiro, Silva, Vries, 2011), and this relationship in population studies using validated diagnostic criteria. The most consistent evidence supports smoking and nicotine dependence as increasing the risk of panic disorder and generalized anxiety disorder (Moylan, Jacka, Pasco, & Berk, 2012). Additionally, studies show that smokers individuals have less knowledge of the social, psychological, and physical issues related to smoking and quality of life compared to non-smokers (Unubol & Saya, 2019, Figueiró, et al., 2013).

Researchers who examine the risk factors for smoking are often focused on socioeconomic and cultural factors (Twyman, Bonevski, Paul & Bryant, 2014). Previous studies have examined smoking behavior in relation to specific behaviors such as alcohol and caffeine use, food consumption, body weight, and exercise. Several studies found that smoking to alleviate distress was a common motivation for college smokers,

and that smoking cigarettes was viewed as a nonverbal signal of stress, presumably with the goal of obtaining social support. However, college smoking often occurs in the context of other substance use, and this presents a challenge for studies of college smoking because use of other drugs (e.g., alcohol, marijuana) (Magid, Colder, Stroud, Nichter, 2009). The results of a study show that 40% of students in the study were current smokers, and of these students, 66.7% were males. The age at which they started the habit was as early as 11 among males and 16 among females. Family environment was found to be positively associated with participants' smoking behavior. Hookah smoking was considered socially acceptable in some families, with the perception that it was less harmful than cigarettes. Females tended to smoke alone within contained/secret places, whereas males were more likely to smoke in a group environment on the street or near where they lived (Shadid, & Hossain, 2013). Saatci, Inan, Bozdemir, Akpinar, and Ergun, (2004) studied the rate of and attitudes towards smoking among An-Najah National University students. During spring 2010, a questionnaire adopted from the Global Health Professionals Survey and the Global Youth Tobacco Survey was administered to 954 randomly selected full-time students. Overall, 34.7% of the study sample were cigarette or waterpipe smokers, and this rate was higher among males than females (52.7% versus 16.5%). In logistic regression analysis, sex (male), type of college (humanities), older age and higher family income were predictors of current smoking status. Smokers had more negative attitudes toward banning smoking in public areas on campus and toward education about the harmful effects of smoking. It was concluded that anti-smoking programs with special attention to males and students in humanities are badly needed (Unubol & Saya, 2019). Another study assessed the prevalence of smoking and sociodemographic factors related to smoking behavior of first year university students in Adana, Turkey. The main

determinants of regular smoking behavior for university students in Turkey were gender, low academic performance, having smoking friends, high level of income, and a mother with high education level (Jeganathan, Hairi, Al-Sadat & Chinna, 2013). A study on the effects of peer, school and parental factors on the five stages of smoking; never smokers, susceptible never smokers, experimenters, current smokers and ex-smokers found the following results. In the sample, 19.3% were susceptible never smokers, 5.5% were current smokers, 6% were experimenters, and 3.1% were ex-smokers. Gender, ethnicity, best friends' smoking status, high peer pressure, higher number of relatives who smoked, and parental monitoring were found to be associated with smoking stages. Presence of parent-teen conflict was only associated with susceptible never smokers and experimenters, whereas absence of home discussion on smoking hazards was associated with susceptible never smokers and current smokers (Thorberg, & Lyvers, 2006). As it can be observed from the results of the studies indicated above, there are factors which increase and worsen the smoking habits among students, such as friends and family, anxiety, and academic stress. The current study examines the depth of student smokers' behavior through a case study to depict the following: initial complaints, the nature of family and social relationships, pressing academic problems, health conditions, hobbies, and interests, as well as a psychological evaluation.

In relatively fewer studies focused on psychological mechanisms that pose risk factors for smoking, it was reported that depressive mood (Baker, Piper, McCarthy, Majeskie, Fiore, 2004), negative affect (Habibi, et al., 2018), low levels of self-confidence and personal well-being (Bricker, et al., 2009) were associated with smoking addiction. The smoking has a serious impact on the individual's health and personality traits, social, economic, and psychological effects. Although the issue of smoking has been previously studied, but there is a paucity of studies

that has taken a more detailed approach to the case study than just monitoring the relationship and the differences between variables (Khurshid, & Ansari, 2012; Menati, W. et al., 2009; Unubol & Saya, 2019). Finally, Crowe et al. (2011) reviewed literature on the psychological aspects of smoking behavior, highlighting the personal characteristics of smoking as an obstacle to quitting smoking, and reveal that smokers tend to be more extroverted, anxious, tense, and impulsive, and show more traits of neuroticism and psychoticism than do ex-smokers or nonsmokers.

There is no doubt that smoking is very harmful to health, and behavior among students is associated with several psychosocial variables. The smoker is considered a very complex personality because of the many factors associated with smoking behavior, whether these factors are physical, psychological, or social. Personal traits of smokers play an important role in their smoking. Smokers may be characterized by low self-esteem, impulsiveness, stress and neuroticism. Thus, there was a need to conduct the current study to examine the psychosocial characteristics of student smokers. Therefore, the current study aims to examine the psychosocial characteristics of college student smokers using the case study method, which aims to develop an appropriate therapeutic program to help these students.

Based on this, this study examines the psychosocial characteristics of college student smokers using the case study method, As represented in that:

- Examine the demographic and clinical variables of the smoking students, such as age, hobbies, interests, family members, referral source, and initial reason for referral.
- Analyzing the content of smoker's complaints and identify the reasons why students smoke.
- Evaluation of impact of smoking on the health status of students.
- Evaluation the impact of smoking on the academic performance of students

- Determining the psychological profile of student smokers in the light of BASIC-ID model (Behavior- B, Affective- A, Sensation- S, Images- I, Cognitions – C, Interpersonal Relationship –I and Drugs- D).

### Method

The current study utilized the case study method using quantitative survey to investigate the problems and psychosocial characteristics of college student smokers, thus intending to develop an effective treatment program in helping them. Survey method was widely used in social sciences studies and among university students (Jdaitawi, 2020; Rababah et al., 2012; ). Additionally, case study is a research approach that is used to generate an in-depth, multi-faceted understanding of a complex issue in its real-life context. It is an established research design that is used extensively in a wide variety of disciplines, particularly in the social sciences. A case study can be defined in a variety of ways, the central tenet being the need to explore an event or phenomenon in depth and in its natural context. It is for this reason sometimes referred to as a “naturalistic” design; this contrasts with an “experimental” design (such as a randomized controlled trial) in which the investigator seeks to exert control over and manipulate the variable(s) of interest (Halpern, & Warner, 1993).

The study sample consisted of 25 undergraduate male smokers. The age of the participants ranged from 19 to 23 years, with a mean age of 20.82, and SD of 1.61 year. All students received psychological counseling toward quitting smoking in the University Counseling Center at Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University.

The research data obtained were analyzed according to basic data (gender, age, GPA, college, referral source, initial reason for referral), description of the complaint by the student, family and social history (including the information for parents and siblings as well as the extent of their relationship with each family member, living with/without family, and his relationship with his

friends, etc.), academic problems, health status description (Such as general appearance, sleep and nutrition problems, and physical illnesses), favorite profession, hobbies and interests as well as principled psychological assessment (BASIC ID): (Behavior- B , Affective- A , Sensation- S , Images- I , Cognitions – C , Interpersonal Relationship –I and Drugs- D).

## Results

It can be seen from table 1 that GPA for student smokers is relatively low, with the total number of family members ranging from 3 to 7, with the mean of 5.04. Tables below show some of the social, academic, and family variables for a sample of smokers. Large portion of the sample was referred by the security (92%), where only small number visited by their own (8%). Sixty-four percent of the students indicated living away from family, and 28% indicated having no friends.

The largest percentage of the sample (60%) have academic stress. Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of the health concerns of the sample. There were 14 student smokers suffering from sleep disorders (insomnia), 10 students suffer from eating disorder (anorexia), and 5 students of the sample suffers physical diseases represented in asthma and respiratory diseases. Table 3 refers to the initial psychological evaluation, and it turns out that smokers have the disorder in the following dimensions: Drugs-D (Daily smoking , Substance abuse and Lack of exercise) then Affective- A (Exam anxiety and guilt) then, Cognition-C (Forgetting , poor concentration during the study , Impaired ability to summarize And Limited understanding of the subjects) then Behavior-B (Tantrums and lack of time management and impulsivity, and theft) Compared to other dimensions (Images-I , Interpersonal Relationship –I , and Sensation-S).

**Table1.** Demographic Data for the Sample

Variable	Age	GPA	# of family members
Mean	20.82	3.08	5.04
St. Deviation	1.61	0.56	1.29

**Table 2.** The students' Complaints

Complaint	Percentage
Academic stress was strong reason to smoke and increase the number of cigarettes	56%
Curiosity was the reason behind smoking	48%
I tried to quit smoking but I relapsed.	22%
Isolation and move away from the parents was a big reason to smoke	36%
Smoking whenever feeling bored, empty, or worried	50%
I was smoking since secondary school	20%
It's easy to quit smoking, but I am not interested in it	10%
Smoking due to academic failure	14%
I became smoker because my father, brothers or friends are smokers	28%
Smoking due to family problems at home	16%

**Table 3.** Principled Psychological Assessment

BASIC-ID	M	SD
B-Behavior	8.26	1.68
A-Affective	8.78	1.95
S-Sensation	6.70	1.40
I-Images	7.00	1.73
C- Cognition	8.50	1.67
I-Interpersonal Relationships	6.82	1.61
D-Drugs	9.13	1.39



## Discussion

The findings from the current study are consistent with findings from other studies conducted on college student smokers. The results indicated that smoking behavior was associated with academic stress, and low academic achievement was one of the reasons for starting smoking. Thus, we can conclude that the treatment of smoking among students will result in a positive impact on academic achievement. As for the referral through security was found as a negative indicator which reduced smokers' motivation to quit smoking when compared with self-referral. Motivation toward quitting plays a crucial role in student smoker's commitment to the therapy sessions and therapeutic assignments. Several recent studies have focused on the difference between intrinsic and extrinsic motivators for smoking cessation. It found that current smokers with intrinsic motivations (i.e., health related) were more likely to quit successfully than were smokers with extrinsic motivations (i.e., social influence) (Cacioppo, Hawkley, Norman, Berntson, 2011). This is consistent with studies that focused on smoking and locus of control.

In addition, isolation from parents was one-causing factors of smoking because of the role of the family in the process of emotional support and

monitoring student behavior, which is a finding that subsequent has confirmed. Surprisingly, social isolation was as strong a risk factor for morbidity and mortality as smoking, obesity, sedentary lifestyle, and high blood pressure (Ukwayi, Eja, & Unwanede, 2012). Students who had smoker friends and did not present leadership skills were influenced by the pressure of friends which results in smoking behavior. Indirect peer influences can occur when youth associate with peers who drink or smoke, increasing the availability of these substances, providing role models (Parrott & Murphy, 2012). As shown by the similarities among complaints, such as "Academic stress was strong reason to smoke and increase the number of cigarettes "Smoking whenever I feel bored, empty, or worries", and "curiosity was the reason behind smoking", we conclude that smoking is the result of several psychological, academic, and social factors. We also conclude that for better results and effective treatment programs, students must be interested in therapy by themselves as external referral has been found to negatively correlate. In-between cigarettes, smokers typically report feelings of stress, anxiety and depression Furthermore, the cumulative experience of negative moods in between cigarettes explains why smokers typically



experience worse daily moods than non-smokers (Wetter & Young, 1994).

Smoking has been associated with health problems represented in nutrition disorder, sleep disorders, physical illnesses as well as problems in hobbies, interests and favorite profession. World Health Organization refer to tobacco smoking is currently recognized as the biggest cause of premature death in the developed countries (Herbert et al., 2001). Patton et al. (1996) study found the following results. Smoking was associated with difficulty initiating sleep, and difficulty waking up. Excessive daytime sleepiness is found to be related to smoking only for females while nightmares and disturbing dreams were related to smoking only among males. Smoking was associated with difficulty initiating sleep and with a constellation of symptoms suggestive of sleep fragmentation. Sleep disturbance may be more prevalent among smokers due to the stimulant effects of nicotine, nightly withdrawal, an increased prevalence of sleep disordered breathing relative to non-smokers, and/or an association with psychological disturbance (Patton et al., 1996).

The initial psychological evaluation of student smokers detected the following: daily smoking, substance abuse, lack of exercise, exam anxiety, guilt, forgetting, poor concentration during the study, impaired ability to summarize, and limited understanding of the subjects. Tantrums, lack of time management, impulsivity, theft. All of this leads to problems in the psychological and social compatibility for the student smoker. previous studies have agreed that there was a relationship between smoking and most of these disorders. An association between symptoms of depression and anxiety was observed in studies of adult smokers (Al'Absi, Carr, & Bongard, 2007). Individual personality factors, cognitive factors, and coping resources may play a key role in determining which college students will have a propensity to initiate and continue to smoke (Von, et al., 2005). Also anger predicts intensity of craving, withdrawal symptoms, and neuroendocrine

changes during the first day of a quit attempt (Unubol, & Saya, 2019).

### Conclusion

The study aims to investigate the psychosocial characteristics of college student smokers at Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University. In addition to revealing the impact of age, GPA and family members towards smoking habit. The results of the study showed that the majority of the students having academic stress which led them to smoke. Furthermore, the majority of the students reported that have more disorder in drugs-D (daily smoking, Substance abuse and Lack of exercise) affective- A (exam anxiety and guilt), cognition-C (forgetting, poor concentration during the study, Impaired ability to summarize And Limited understanding of the subjects) and behavior-B (tantrums and lack of time management and impulsivity, and theft) compared to other dimensions (images-I , interpersonal relationship –I , and sensation-S). Although, previous studies provide important information on the smoking habit and associated factors, more studies are needed. Therefore, this study added to literature on smoking habit and factors associated to the phenomena. This serious problem suggests a need for more attention towards smoking behavior and its consequences as well as smoking cessation and prevention programs are needed to control the negative impacts of smoking on individual life.

### Limitations and Recommendation

Like other studies, the present study possesses limitations, and the findings of the study can only be generalized within the boundaries of investigation. The first limitation lies in the selection of a purposive sampling owing to the large number of university students. Second limitation is the sample size which targeted only Smoker bachelor's degree students while master and doctoral students in the universities were not included, therefore, the interpretation of our findings should be limited to college bachelor students. Another limitation is this study was

conducted among male student; hence, the present study recommends a similar study to be conducted among female university students. Furthermore, although the research applied well known and validated instruments related to the important problem that needs to be empirically and systematically understood, a mixture of various data collection techniques should be considered such as face-to-face interview and phone interviews to enhance the results.

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