

## **Tobacco Smoking among Young People: A Comparative Study**

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### Abstract

Tobacco smoking is a worldwide public health problem. Despite the existence of anti-smoking campaigns and laws in many countries, each year, the death of 5 million individuals can be attributed to smoking or living in a smoking environment. This problem is even more acute in developing countries. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the death toll due to tobacco smoking will attain 8 million individuals by the year 2030 (WHO web site, 2014), of which 70% will be in developing countries. Most people concerned with this problem consider that it is important to conceive anti-smoking campaigns aimed at the youth, given that smoking dependence is a direct of function of the age at which one starts smoking. The objective of this research is therefore to study and compare the smoking behavior of adolescent consumers aged between 15 and 20 in two countries with different levels of economic development, namely Tunisia and Canada.

The data were collected among a sample of 307 Tunisian adolescents (including 169 regular smokers) and 242 Canadian adolescents (including 101 regular smokers) through a self-administered questionnaire distributed in schoolyards and in various areas around the schools having accepted to collaborate to this research project. The questionnaire was composed of six sections. The first section was aimed at comparing the perceptions of tobacco as a product with those of ordinary (i.e., non-smoking) products and also included a question about the influence of the adolescent's immediate social surroundings (parents, brothers and sisters, best friends, etc.) with respect to tobacco consumption. The second section was addressed to regular smokers only and included questions about tobacco consumption, purchase habits, the reasons why one started smoking, as well as the motivations behind tobacco smoking. The third section was addressed to non-smokers with the main objective of trying to understand what leads them to not smoke. The last three sections were destined to all participants; they included among other things measures of attitude toward smoking, perceived risks associated with tobacco, and self-esteem. Some questions related to the perception of anti-smoking campaigns (e.g., their effectiveness) were also included in the questionnaire along with socio-demographic descriptors.

The data collected are rich and preliminary analyses reveal interesting differences among the samples in the two countries. The results of this research will have pertinent public policy implications and will help policy makers to better understand tobacco consumption among adolescents in order to develop more efficient and better targeted anti-smoking campaigns for this population.