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Smoking among non-collegiate 18-24 year olds

According to the CDC, 28.7% of young adults ages 18-24 years old are smokers. (CDC, 2001). Research has shown that the initiation of smoking occurs most often during grades six - nine (ages 11-15). There is evidence of a cohort-effect among smokers. If a class or birth cohort establishes a high rate of smoking at an early age, then the smoking rate is likely to remain high through the life period, simply because of addictive nature of tobacco (Monitoring the Future, 2002).

Is there a difference in the smoking prevalence rates between non-college educated 18-24 year olds and 18-24 year old college students?

Yes, there are striking differences between the two groups. The 2002 Monitoring the Future Survey reports that college student prevalence of daily smoking is 16% versus 32% for high school graduates who are of the same age and currently not full-time college students. Smoking at the rate of half-pack per day stands at 8% versus 22% for these two groups, respectively (Monitoring the Future, 2002).

The differences in smoking between these two groups are seen prior to high school graduation. There are marked differences in the prevalence rates of the college-bound high school senior versus the non-college bound high school senior. Non-college bound high school seniors were found to be 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ times more likely to smoke $\frac{1}{2}$ or more packs of cigarettes per day than the college-bound high school senior. In 2001, 43.5% of non-college students surveyed 4 years after high school reported that they smoked), (Monitoring the Future, 2002).

Are there hypotheses to explain the differences in the two groups?

Yes. There have been multiple explanations for the differences between the non-college 18-24 year olds and the college students age 18-24. These include:

- MSA restrictions. The MSA prevents tobacco companies from marketing to youth 17 years and younger, so they are targeting the 18 and older crowd.
- Marketing trends of tobacco companies. Research has shown that non-college 18-24 year olds are more likely to become established smokers and the tobacco companies are "cashing in" on this research. (A comment from the R.J. Reynolds Established Brands planning meeting... [Among young adult smokers] "the less educated, working class smokers are becoming more important Established brands strategic planning meeting 4-22/23,1985 (850422-850423). Younger adults smokers, RJ Reynolds, April 23, 1985, Bates No. 505643331/3343. Available at: <http://legacy.library.ucsf.edu/tid/yrb15d00>)
- Lack of a central venue for non-college 18-24 year olds. It is easier to have targeted prevention and cessation programs for college students because they are a captive audience. It is hard to reach the non-college 18-24 year olds because there is no central connection.

What should be done to bridge the gap?

- Evaluate tobacco industry marketing strategies and develop counter-marketing campaign for non-college 18-24 year olds. Develop culturally appropriate campaigns.
- Provide prevention programs to delay the onset of smoking initiation. Providing prevention programs for students during the critical years (grades 6-9), with targeted messages to the most at risk students (lower socioeconomic and less academic students) may prove to be worthwhile strategies to decrease tobacco use among this population.
- Implement further studies to identify factors related to smoking for the non-collegiate 18-24 year olds.
- Design and implement interventions for the 18-24 years who are not in college. They are the most at risk to become lifetime smokers, but unfortunately the hardest to reach because of the lack of a common venue for prevention and intervention efforts.

Key Resources

Daily cigarette consumption in early adulthood: Age of smoking initiation and duration of smoking

Breslau, N. *Drug and Alcohol Dependence* 33(3) 287-91, 1993.

MMWR Highlights. Prevalence of Current Cigarette Smoking Among Adults and Changes in Prevalence of Current and Some Day Smoking - United States, 1996-2001 (CDC).

http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/research_data/adults_prev/mm5214_highlights.htm

Monitoring the Future: National Survey Results on Drug Use 1975-2002. Volume 1: Secondary School Students (University of Michigan)

http://www.monitoringthefuture.org/pubs/monographs/vol1_2002.pdf

Monitoring the Future: National Survey Results on Drug Use, 1975-2002. Volume II: College Students and Adults Ages 19-40 (University of Michigan)

http://www.monitoringthefuture.org/pubs/monographs/vol2_2002.pdf

Smoking on the rise among young adults: Implications for research and policy

Lantz, P. *Tobacco Control*, Supplement 1: I60-I70, 2003.

http://tc.bmjournals.com/cgi/content/abstract/12/suppl_1/i60

Why and how the tobacco industry sells cigarettes to young adults: Evidence from industry documents

Ling, PM and Glantz, SA. *American Journal of Public Health* 92(6):908-916, 2002

<http://kstask.org/pdf/LingAJPHYoungAdults.pdf>