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*The phenomenon of "nicotinism" among teenagers living  
in state orphanages in the city of Lublin*

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Zjawisko nikotynizmu wśród młodzieży zamieszkującej państwowe  
domy dziecka na terenie Lublina

OBJECTIVE

Smoking tobacco is a serious risk factor for one's health. The intensifying phenomenon of smoking cigarettes by children and teenagers in our country becomes a crucial social and medical problem due to the consequences of nicotinism for a developing organism. Researchers of psychosocial conditions of smoking cigarettes by children claim that the important factor is the influence of family, school and peers. Also doctors play an important and responsible role in shaping proper attitudes towards smoking. The objective of the study was analysing the phenomenon of nicotinism, its spreading and intensifying among teenagers living in State Orphanages in Lublin.

Another aim of the study was also determining the factors conditioning this addiction.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

Data regarding the addiction to smoking were gathered among the pupils of State Orphanages in Lublin. Personal analysis distinguished two factors, i.e. age and sex. 76 persons took part in the examination. It was a group of young people who expressed

their willingness to co-operate in the examination by answering the questions in the questionnaire. Information on the addiction to smoking was collected on the basis of an auditor questionnaire. The questionnaire secured anonymity and was filled in the presence of the authoress.

## RESULTS

Teenagers at the age of 13 - 21 years took part in the examination. It was a group of 76 persons: 36 girls (47.7% of the questioned) and 40 boys (54.3% of the questioned). The group was divided into teenagers smoking daily - 39.4% of all participants, teenagers smoking occasionally - 12.2% of all participants, teenagers who tried smoking in the past but at the moment claim to be non-smokers - 27.3% of all participants, and teenagers who have never smoked - 27.1%.

The degree of popularity of smoking among girls is as follows: 46.7% are daily smokers, 6.7% smoke occasionally, 13.3% of those who used to smoke in the past but at the moment do not smoke, and 33.3% are those who have never smoked.

The data concerning boys are as follows: 33.4% are daily smokers, 16.6% - occasional smokers, 38.8% attempted to smoke in the past, and 11.2% have never smoked cigarettes.

Table 1. The degree of popularity of smoking among teenagers

	Girls	Boys
Daily smokers	46.7%	33.4%
Occasional smokers	6.7%	16.6%
Smoked in the past	13.3%	38.8%
Ever smoked	33.3%	11.2%

First attempts at smoking cigarettes take place at the age of 11 - 13 years. Most teenagers smoke their first cigarette at that age (45% of the questioned teenagers), while 14.8% admitted to making an attempt at smoking at the age of 6.

The degree of addiction to nicotine can be stated on the basis of the number of cigarettes smoked daily and the period of smoking cigarettes. Among teenagers smoking daily 30.8% smoke up to 5 cigarettes a day, 46.1% up to 10 cigarettes, and 23.1% smoke more than 10 cigarettes a day 15.3% of the questioned teenagers admitted to smoking

daily for a couple of months, 7.7% have smoked for over a year, 38.5% have smoked for 2 - 3 years and also 38.5% have smoked for more than 4 years.

The motives of taking up smoking were as follows: their own will and curiosity to try something new in case of 46.1% of daily smokers, and the influence of peers and their persuasion in case of 43.9%. Among occasional smokers the motives of reaching for the first cigarette were their will and curiosity or peers' persuasion in 75%. Among teenagers who used to smoke but no longer do the main motive of taking up smoking was their own will. It was the case of 66.7% of the questioned, and 33.3% claimed that the reason was the influence of peers. Nobody among the questioned considered encouraging advertisements of cigarettes as a motive to take up smoking.

Table 2. Motives of taking up smoking among teenagers

	Daily smokers	Occasional smokers	Smoked in the past
Curiosity to try something new	46.1%	75.0%	66.7%
Influence of peers	43.9%	25.0%	33.3%
Advertisements of cigarettes	0%	0%	0%

The influence of smoking cigarettes by parents on spreading the addiction among teenagers was evaluated on the basis of answers to the following question: Has, in your opinion, lack of good example at home any influence on taking up smoking by teenagers? 66.5% of daily smokers said yes and 38.5% said there was no influence. Among occasional smokers the opinions for and against were 50% each.

44.4% of teenagers who used to smoke claimed that lack of good example at home had influence on spreading the addiction of smoking among them and 55.6% claimed otherwise. Among persons who have never smoked 42.8% considered parents« as a crucial factor influencing teenagers, and 57.2% said that the fact that parents smoke has no influence on children's smoking.

Among teenagers smoking daily both parents smoked in 69.2% cases, and in 30.8% cases only one parent smoked. Among occasional smokers both parents smoked in 70.2% cases and in 29.8% cases one parent did. Among those who used to smoke but no longer do both parents smoked in 75.1% cases, and in 24.9% cases one parent did. Among teenagers who claimed they had never smoked both parents smoked in 85.7% cases, and in 14.3% only one parent did.

Table 3. Influence of parents' smoking on spreading the addiction to smoking among teenagers

	Daily smokers	Occasional smokers	Smoked in the past	Never smoked
Yes	61.5%	50.0%	44.4%	42.8%
No	38.5%	50.0%	55.6%	57.2%

According to the teenagers, the activity of health service in spreading anti-nicotine education is assessed in the following way: 12.1% of the questioned considered it good and sufficient, 39.5% considered it good but not sufficient, and 48.4% considered it insufficient, hardly visible and not effective.

The main source of information about harmfulness of smoking among the pupils of State Orphanages are their tutors (39.5%); the least information on that subject is provided by television and radio programmes (12.1%); brochures, leaflets, and books are the source of information for 21.2% of teenagers. School was considered the main source of knowledge about harmfulness of smoking by 27.2% of all participants.

57.6% of the questioned teenagers claimed that lessons at school devoted to harmful influence of smoking on human organism were the factor that could discourage young people from smoking their first cigarette.

## DISCUSSION

Research conducted among teenagers from State Orphanages proves that the habit of smoking cigarettes is widespread. Over 50% of the participants have already experienced their first attempts to smoke. It is a very high percentage. Research among school teenagers conducted over the past few years shows that 40% of pupils at the age of 14 - 15 years admit smoking cigarettes (1). Such popularity of the addiction to smoking as shown in the above mentioned research can result from the fact that the examined teenagers often come from pathological background; a cigarette in the hand of a teenager in such environment is nothing surprising. Among the questioned teenagers the habit of smoking daily is more popular among girls than boys.

In the studies of other authors conducted by Medical University and Mother and Child Institute in Warsaw, boys constitute the majority of smokers (2). Boys more often admit the attempts at smoking in the past and giving up the addiction at present. The most frequently named motive of smoking cigarettes among the questioned teenagers is their own curiosity and the will to try something new. Interestingly enough, any of the

questioned children considers advertisements of cigarettes the factor initiating smoking. Many of the examined young people admit to very early contacts with cigarettes. It is often as early as at the age of 6. Usually the first attempts at smoking take place at the age of 13 - 14 years. The habit acquired at that age often remains for the rest of life. Some young people start smoking cigarettes imitating adults. Does the image of parents smoking a cigarette influence the addiction among children? Over 60% of the questioned teenagers claiming to be daily smokers consider the example of parents a bad factor having an influence on taking up smoking. In this group 60% of both parents smoke. 40% of persons who have never smoked believe that parents' smoking is a crucial motive influencing that habit in children. In this group 85% have had smoking parents. Many studies on nicotinism of teenagers discuss the influence of family background on the addiction of teenagers (4). Smoking parents are not a good example for their children. In the families of smokers an easy access to cigarettes can encourage children to try smoking. Parents will not smell nicotine from the child since they are soaked with its smell themselves. Thus, they will not be able to notice the moment when the child enters the dangerous path. This study also proves that the opinions and behaviour of parents influence the development of smoking among teenagers. It shows at the same time that curiosity and will are the main factors that influence taking up smoking by teenagers. Since fighting this addiction is very difficult, it is important to do all the best to protect children and teenagers from it. Activities of the health service in preventing the spread of smoking among teenagers are considered by teenagers mostly ineffective and hardly noticeable. There is no direct contact between a doctor or a nurse and a young person who would like to give up smoking. The pupils of Orphanages say that their tutors are the main source of information about harmfulness of smoking cigarettes. They give school as the second source of information. The questioned teenagers like the idea of lessons at school devoted to discussing harmfulness of smoking cigarettes. More than a half of the participants claim that such lessons would be a factor discouraging young people from taking up smoking.

#### CONCLUSIONS

1. Among the pupils of State Orphanages the addiction to smoking cigarettes is widespread.
2. In the examined group of teenagers more girls than boys smoke daily.
3. The main motive of taking up smoking among the questioned teenagers is their own curiosity and will to try something new.
4. Preventive activities should be conducted with active participation of teenagers. They recognise the need and necessity to fight with the addiction. They are for conducting such activities at school.

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## STRESZCZENIE

Praca ukazuje wyniki badań dotyczących zjawiska nikotynizmu, jego rozpowszechnienia i nasilenia wśród młodzieży mieszkającej w Państwowych Domach Dziecka w Lublinie. Stwierdzono znaczne rozpowszechnienie nałogu palenia: aż 46,7% dziewcząt i 33,4% chłopców pali papierosy codziennie. Własna ciekawość i chęć poznania czegoś nowego to główna przyczyna palenia papierosów wśród ankietowanej młodzieży. Nikt z ankietowanych nie uznał reklamy papierosów za czynnik zachęcający do rozpoczęcia palenia.