



Young adult former ever smokers: The role of type of smoker, quit attempts, quit aids, attitudes/beliefs, and demographics



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ARTICLE INFO

Available online 8 September 2013

Keywords:

Young adults
Smoking
Tobacco use cessation

ABSTRACT

Objective. Young adults who smoke are often nondaily users who either quit or transition into dependent smokers. Further, this age group often has been considered an extension of the adult population. This study aims to examine young adult former ever smokers to understand factors associated with their stopping smoking.

Method. Telephone interviews were conducted in 2010 with 4401 young adults in Florida. We examined the association between former ever smokers and sociodemographics, smoking behavior, quit attempts, quit aids, and attitudes/beliefs about smoking.

Results. Thirty-seven percent of young adults were former smokers, 20% were current smokers, and 43% were never smokers. Former smokers were more likely to be female, situational smokers (compared to occasional or established), more likely to have stopped smoking without acknowledging making a quit attempt, less likely to have used a quit aid, and less likely to display pro-tobacco attitudes/beliefs.

Conclusion. Young adult former and current smokers have unique patterns of smoking and stopping smoking. Young adults may require novel intervention techniques to promote prevention and cessation based on these unique smoking patterns. Future research is needed to understand motivations to quit smoking among young adults.

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Introduction

Nationally, in 2010, about 34% of young adults (18–25 years) reported smoking in the past 30 days (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality, 2012), the highest of any age group. Young adulthood is a critical period of transition, with young adults initiating smoking, becoming dependent smokers, or quitting smoking (Dietz et al., 2013). According to the 2012 Surgeon General's Report, among adults who had ever smoked daily, 11% reported having their first cigarette as young adults (19–26), with 31% being daily smokers (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2012). However, not all young adult smokers continue to smoke into adulthood; many smokers (51%) quit during this period (Wetter et al., 2004).

Tobacco control programs across the country use a number of methods to stop or prevent tobacco use. Some of these methods include: legislative policies to ban smoking in public spaces, schools, and businesses; restriction of sales to minors; discontinuation of vending machine cigarette sales; limitation of the number of retailers allowed to sell tobacco products; and economic approaches like increasing the cost of cigarettes (Starr et al., 2005). Another important approach focuses on tobacco advertising and counter-advertising campaigns (National Cancer Institute, 2005). These strategies work together to send anti-tobacco messages to the public and create an environment where non-smoking is the norm.

However, despite these approaches, smoking initiation and use continues. Similar to national estimates, young adults in Florida have the highest percentage of smokers of any age group, with 20.1% being current smokers (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2010). Young adults differ from older adults in their smoking habits in that they are more often nondaily, occasional, or “social” smokers (Moran et al., 2004; Wortley et al., 2003). Moreover, young adults often do not consider themselves to be “real” smokers or have a need to quit (Berg and Schauer, 2012; Berg et al., 2010, 2012b). Therefore, a “one-size fits all” approach to address the adult population may not be most effective

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in preventing this vulnerable population from escalating to established smokers or enabling them to quit. Tobacco control programs, in particular, often have overlooked young adults by targeting prevention messages to youth and cessation messages to older adults.

Public health research on young adult smoking cessation is limited, and the literature is based largely on young adult daily smokers (Song and Ling, 2011). Less attention has been paid to smoking cessation among young adult intermittent smokers, possibly due to varying definitions of nondaily, occasional, or social smoking and the heterogeneity that exists within these nondaily smoking groups (Lenk et al., 2009). Existing literature also focuses predominantly on college students (Freedman et al., 2012; Murphy-Hoefer et al., 2005), whereas evidence suggests that there are important differences in smoking habits between young adults in school and the workforce and even between young adults in two-year colleges and those in four-year colleges (Berg et al., 2011; Dietz et al., 2013; Freedman et al., 2012).

Extant young adult cessation studies show that young adults who represent the age group are most likely to attempt to quit smoking and are more likely to be successful in their quit attempts (Ling and Glantz, 2004; Messer et al., 2008). Past research shows that readiness to quit smoking among young adults is associated with being a social smoker, smoking more for boredom and less for self-confidence, having fewer friends who smoke, binge drinking less frequently (Berg et al., 2012a), being a former daily/converted nondaily smoker compared to native nondaily smoker (Pinsker et al., 2012), and supporting action against the tobacco industry (Ling et al., 2009). A study by Song and Ling (2011) showed that self-identified social smokers were less likely to quit than behavioral social smokers or established smokers, demonstrating that self-perception of smoking is an important factor for cessation in this age group.

Because young adults are in a key period of smoking transition, and because there are vast benefits of early cessation (Doll et al., 2005), it is vital to reach this population to increase or strengthen the normative notions of non-smoking. One way is to increase understanding of smoking behaviors among young adults, including quit behaviors and attitudes toward tobacco use. Effective smoking cessation messages or strategies can then help young adults quit before becoming lifelong smokers. In this paper, we examine former ever smokers and how the role of type of smoker, quit attempts, quit aids, and tobacco-related attitudes and beliefs affects stopping smoking. We hypothesize that young adult former ever smokers will be less likely to be established smokers, use quit aids in past attempts, and have pro-tobacco views compared to current smokers.

Methods

Sample

Collected data via telephone interviews in 2010 were part of the evaluation of the Tobacco Free Florida campaign. The final sample is composed of 4401 young adults, 18–24 years. The sampling frame included telephone numbers for young adults from college registrar lists in the state as well as from a vendor generated listed sample focusing on young adults (Genesys, Inc.). The final sample was representative of young adults in Florida by age, gender, race/ethnicity, and educational attainment, based on 2000 Census data (2010 data were not available at the time of the survey). We allowed 10 callbacks to secure the telephone interviews and participants received a \$20 incentive for their participation. A detailed account of the study methods has been reported previously (Dietz et al., 2013).

Variables

The dependent variable for smoking status was created from two key tobacco use items. First, we asked participants if they had ever tried cigarette smoking, even one or two puffs. Participants who responded positively were then asked how many days they smoke cigarettes in the last 30 days, even one or two puffs. Respondents who smoked one or more days were considered a current smoker. This is based on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

youth definition of current smoking (Sly et al., 2001); we use this more inclusive definition to capture light/intermittent smokers. Former ever smokers were defined as young adults who had not smoked in the last 30 days, but had responded that they tried cigarette smoking in the past ranging from young adults who ever tried smoking to former established users.

To assess type of smoker, we used two CDC smoking status items: Days smoked per month and number of cigarettes smoked per day. We cross-tabulated these items to create a matrix showing the level of cigarette use (Sly et al., 2001). Young adults who smoked nine or less days per month and smoked four or less cigarettes per day were considered situational smokers (reference), occasional smokers smoked 10 or more days and five or more cigarettes per day, while established users smoked 20 or more days per month and two or more cigarettes per day. For a full description of each item used to create the independent variables, see Appendix 1.

Number of quit attempts is a self-reported item assessed by asking the participant how many times s/he tried to quit smoking in the past. We categorized responses as none (reference), one or two times, or three or more times. To assess participant use of quit aids, we asked if they had ever used a prescription from a physician, used nicotine replacement therapy (NRT), or called a help line or Quitline to quit smoking. We then created a dummy variable so that any of the aforementioned are considered a positive response (1 = yes; 0 = no).

Four attitude/belief indices were derived from questions relating to participants' opinions about government intervention to reduce tobacco use, health risks associated with smoking, smoker characteristics, and smoker/nonsmoker relationships. Response categories were a four category Likert type response (definitely agree, probably agree, probably disagree, or definitely disagree). Indices were scored into low, medium, or high, with the higher score reflecting more pro-tobacco attitudes/beliefs (Dietz et al., 2013). The indices have a moderate level of reliability (Dietz et al., 2013).

The government intervention index assessed participants' support of government involvement to control tobacco based on five items assessing these particular attitudes/beliefs. Young adults with the weakest support for government involvement ranked high in pro-tobacco attitudes/beliefs. Next, the health risks of smoking index, created using four attitude/belief items, assessed participants' perception of the risks related to smoking, with those acknowledging the fewest risks ranking high in pro-tobacco attitudes/beliefs. The smoker characteristic index assessed participants' perception of smokers' personal characteristics using eight attitude/belief items. Participants who viewed smokers more positively were ranked high in pro-tobacco attitudes/beliefs. Finally, the smoker/nonsmoker relationship index assessed participants' views that smokers and nonsmokers tend to be socially isolated from one another. Eight items created this index, with participants who disagreed ranking high in pro-tobacco attitudes/beliefs.

Six demographic characteristics were assessed. Age was categorized as 18–21 years (reference) vs. 22–24 years. Gender was coded male (reference) vs. female. Race/ethnicity is composed of two items and categorized as Non-Hispanic (NH) White (reference), NH Black, Hispanic, and Other. Education level includes college graduate or more (reference), some college, high school graduate, and less than high school, while school versus straight to work status is composed of three items where we assessed if the respondent reported having a high school education or less, was enrolled in a trade/technical school, and his/her level of income (extended education (reference) vs. straight to work). Finally, employment status was categorized as full-time (reference), part-time, unemployed/looking for work, and not in labor force.

Analyses

Descriptive analyses were conducted to identify differences in sociodemographic factors and smoking variables between former ever smokers, current smokers, and never smokers. Multivariate logistic regression was conducted to examine factors affecting former ever smoking relative to current smoking; never smokers were excluded from the analyses. All data analyses were performed using SAS version 9.3 (SAS Institute Inc., Cary, NC). This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board of the University of Miami.

Results

Our sample showed that former ever smokers were light users, with 90% smoking five or fewer days per month and 93% smoking four

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