

Germany: Every fifth adolescent smokes

23 April 2008

As many as 20% of adolescents from 11 to 17 years of age smoke. This was the result of the nationwide German Health Interview and Examination Survey for Children and Adolescents (KiGGS), performed by the Robert Koch Institute and presented by the sociologist Thomas Lampert in the current edition of *Deutsches Ärzteblatt International* (Dtsch Arztebl Int 2008; 105[15]: 265-71).

The analysis of tobacco consumption by children and adolescents covered almost 7,000 girls and boys aged 11 to 17. Data on the current smoking status and on exposure to passive smoking were collected for the years 2003 to 2006. Possible factors influencing the findings were examined, including the social status of the family, the type of school attended by the adolescents, and the smoking status of parents and friends.

Thomas Lampert's study shows that friends and the type of school have greater influence on smoking behavior than the parents do. The probability that an adolescent starts smoking is markedly greater when his or her friends smoke. The risk is hardly increased if the parents smoke. On the other hand, students at general secondary schools (Hauptschule), intermediate schools (Realschule) or comprehensive schools (Gesamtschule) smoke much more frequently than do pupils at high school (Gymnasium).

The prejudice that boys smoke more often than girls could be disproved. The proportion of smoking girls is just as high, although they smoke fewer cigarettes. The average age of starting is between 13 and 14 years for both genders. Social status has hardly any effect on adolescents' smoking behavior. In contrast, smoking parents expose their children to additional stress from passive smoking.

Lampert concludes that there should be more emphasis on prevention of smoking by students at Hauptschule, Realschule, and Gesamtschule.

Source: *Deutsches Ärzteblatt International*

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