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## Tobacco smoking versus the future life partner – students' opinions and choices

### Abstract

**Introduction.** Diagnosing the motives of young people in the choice of life partners seems significant both for widely understood public health, and for forecasting the state of health of potential families.

**Aim.** The purpose of the survey was to get to know students' opinions on health behaviour of their girlfriends or boyfriends and to determine whether the fact of smoking tobacco influences the choice of the candidate for a life partner.

**Material and methods.** The survey was part of a pilot diagnosis of behaviour, opinions and attitudes of students with regard to health, constituting a basis for the project "Health – Promoting University". The surveyed group consisted of 207 students from three Lublin universities: Maria-Curie Skłodowska University (UMCS), Catholic University of Lublin (KUL) and Medical University of Lublin (MU).

**Results.** An anonymous diagnostic survey was applied, with the use of random sampling. Thirteen percent of the surveyed women are active smokers, of which the largest group consists of psychology students, and the percentage of smoking men is 29%. Sixteen percent of women and 10% men are ex-smokers. Women more frequently than men are passive smokers. Current tobacco smokers are mostly inhabitants of cities and they are students whose both parents smoke. As many as 1/3 of partners of the surveyed students smoke tobacco. The fact that the future life partner is a smoker is significant, but there were also students for whom the fact that their current or potential partner is or would be a smoker is of no significance. The students' smoking tobacco attached to this aspect least importance, and the most importance was attached by students whose parents were both non-smokers.

**Conclusions.** The obtained results directly confirm the thesis that the choice of a life partner is connected with the assessment of his/her health behaviour (in this case – tobacco smoking) and can have an impact on the "health-related quality" of students' relationships in the future and on the satisfaction of partners forming the relationships. The conducted research confirmed that among the surveyed group of students there is greater tolerance towards tobacco smoking by the partner in the case of persons who are themselves active smokers, and the necessity to undertake anti-smoking measures by universities in the form of support for students who are active and passive smokers.

**Keywords:** tobacco smoking, student, life partner.

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### INTRODUCTION

Tobacco smoking is a type of behaviour with negative consequences affecting not only active smokers but also people in their closest environment. Its impact has many aspects. Unfortunately, the negative consequences of active and passive smoking are enormous [1]. Tobacco smoking in men and women is crucial for their fertility, health and normal development. The aesthetic, cultural and economic aspects of tobacco smoking, manifesting themselves in interpersonal relations and family life, should also be taken into consideration. Thus, the question "Do you smoke?" is particularly significant in the context of choosing the future partner. The answer cannot impact the health of all the members of the future family and, in terms of health culture, lower the quality of life of the family in various dimensions. The period

of university education is when new contacts are made, being a potential starting point for more serious, long-term relationships [2]. Identifying the motives behind young people's choices of their life partners, apart from the key reasons associated with feelings, seems crucial both for public health in general terms and for projections about the health of potential families. Universities are environments which should provide a system for their members promoting healthy life choices and correcting anti-health behaviour [3,4].

### AIM

The aim of the study was to identify students' opinions about health behaviour of their boyfriends or girlfriends and to determine whether tobacco smoking has impact

on the choice of the life partner. The survey was part of a pilot research analysing the behaviour, opinions and attitudes of students with regard to health, constituting a basis for the project “the Health Promoting University”.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

The surveyed group consisted of 207 students from three Lublin universities: biology students from the Maria-Curie Skłodowska University (UMCS) (1<sup>st</sup> year, 52 people), psychology students from the Catholic University of Lublin (KUL) (2<sup>nd</sup> year, 57 people) and nursing and obstetrics students from the Medical University of Lublin (UM) (respectively, 1<sup>st</sup> year students of Master’s degree studies – 50 people and 2<sup>nd</sup> year students of Bachelor’s degree studies – 48 people). An anonymous diagnostic survey was applied, with the use of random sampling. Women comprised 85% of the surveyed group of students.

## RESULTS

### The incidence of active and passive tobacco smoking among the surveyed students and the related family problems

Thirteen percent of the surveyed women are active smokers, of which the largest group comprises psychology students (22%), and the percentage of smoking male students is 29%. Sixteen percent of women and 10% of men are ex-smokers, and the most numerous in the group are female nursing students (as many as 36%) and 17% of female obstetrics students. Among the persons who have never smoked tobacco, women are more often than men passive smokers. On average 29% of the surveyed students frequently spend their time in rooms filled with tobacco smoke. In the case of men, the corresponding group accounts for 13%. As many as 36% of female nursing students declare that they are passive smokers. In turn, 60% of female students of biology and nearly half of female students of obstetrics (45%) and psychology (46%) are women who have never smoked tobacco actively and who are rarely exposed to tobacco smoke. The future psychologists prevail in the group of men who are affected by the tobacco problem to the least extent. Seventy one percent of members of the group have never smoked and are rarely exposed to tobacco smoke.

**TABLE 1. The incidence of the tobacco smoking problem – differences between universities.**

	UMCS Biology %	UM Nursing %	KUL Psychology %	UM Obstetrics %
I currently smoke tobacco	13.5	12.0	22.8	12.5
I used to smoke	5.8	34.0	7.0	16.7
I’ve never smoked actively but I often smoke passively	25.0	34.0	21.1	25.0
I’ve never smoked actively and I rarely smoke passively	55.8	20.0	49.1	45.8

**TABLE 2. The incidence of the tobacco smoking problem versus gender and type of university.**

	UMCS Biology		UM Nursing		KUL Psychology		UM Obstetrics		Total	
	F %	M %	F %	M %	F %	M %	F %	M %	F %	M %
I currently smoke tobacco	8.6	23.5	6.8	50.0	22.0	28.6	12.8	0.0	13.1	29.0
I used to smoke	2.9	11.8	36.4	16.7	8.0	0.0	17.0	0.0	16.5	9.7
I’ve never smoked actively but I often smoke passively	28.6	17.6	36.4	16.7	24.0	0.0	25.5	0.0	28.4	12.9
I’ve never smoked actively and I rarely smoke passively	60.0	47.1	20.5	16.7	46.0	71.4	44.7	100	42.0	48.4

The majority of students currently smoking tobacco are the inhabitants of cities. They account for nearly 44% of all current active smokers. The corresponding group of students from rural areas constitutes 25%.

**TABLE 3. The place of residence of students currently smoking tobacco.**

	UMCS Biology %	UM Nursing %	KUL Psychology %	UM Obstetrics %	Total %
Cities	13.5	12.0	22.8	12.5	43.8
Towns	5.8	34.0	7.0	16.7	31.3
Rural areas	25.0	34.0	21.1	25.0	25.0

The considerable majority of the active smokers group consisted of students whose both parents smoked. Non-smokers and students who rarely smoked passively were children of non-smoking parents.

**TABLE 4. Tobacco smoking in the group of parents of the surveyed students.**

	I currently smoke tobacco %	I used to smoke %	I’ve never smoked actively but I often smoke passively %	I’ve never smoked actively and I rarely smoke passively %
Both parents smoke	34.4	18.8	27.8	16.9
One of the parents smokes/used to smoke	40.6	62.5	50.0	39.3
Neither of the parents smokes/used to smoke	25.0	18.8	22.2	43.8

In turn, half of the surveyed students with one parent smoking were also regular passive smokers. These results might point to sources of tobacco smoke other than the family home, for instance the friends’ circle.

### The incidence of tobacco smoking among the partners of the surveyed students

As many as 1/3 of the partners of the surveyed students smoke tobacco. The most unfavourable results were found in the group of psychology students, followed by obstetrics students. Over 36% of the members of the group have tobacco-smoking partners. The most favourable situation was observed in the group of biology students (16% of partners are smokers) and nursing students (over 27% of partners are active tobacco smokers).

**TABLE 5. The incidence of tobacco smoking among the surveyed students' partners – broken by universities.**

	UMCS Biology %	UM Nursing %	KUL Psychology %	UM Obstetrics %	Total %
The partner does not smoke	83.9	72.5	63.6	67.6	71.7
The partner smokes	16.1	27.5	36.4	32.4	28.3

The highest percentage of people who did not have a partner were those currently smoking tobacco (43.8%).

**TABLE 6. The incidence of tobacco smoking among the surveyed students' partners versus tobacco smoking by the respondents.**

	The partner smokes %	The partner does not smoke %	I am currently single %
I currently smoke tobacco	25.0	31.3	43.8
I used to smoke	28.1	50.0	21.9
I've never smoked actively but I often smoke passively	22.2	51.9	25.9
I've never smoked actively and I rarely smoke passively	11.2	50.6	38.2

One fourth of partners of currently smoking students are smokers as well. Correspondingly, the currently smoking students the least often have non-smoking partners (31.3% of partners). In turn, at least 50% of partners of non-smoking students and those who used to smoke in the past, regardless of the degree of exposure to tobacco smoke, are non-smokers.

### Respondents' opinions on the significance of the fact whether their partners smoke

For most of the respondents, the fact of smoking tobacco by a potential life partner is crucial. Nearly 56% of female students and 52% of male students expressed such an opinion. High priority is given to this aspect by biology students – mainly men (64.7%) and female students of nursing (63.6% of the surveyed), obstetrics (more than 51%) and psychology (50.0%). The surveyed group of students also included those for whom the fact of smoking tobacco by their future partner was totally insignificant. This group was dominated by male students of psychology (over 28% of the surveyed male psychologists-to-be).

**TABLE 7. Respondents' opinions on the significance of their partners' smoking versus the type of university.**

	UMCS Biology		UM Nursing		KUL Psychology		UM Obstetrics		Total	
	F %	M %	F %	M %	F %	M %	F %	M %	F %	M %
Yes, it is very significant	60.0	64.7	63.6	33.3	50.0	28.6	51.1	100	55.7	51.6
Yes, it is significant, but to a limited extent	34.3	23.5	34.1	16.7	38.0	42.9	34.0	0.0	35.2	25.8
No, it is insignificant	5.7	11.8	2.3	50.0	12.0	28.6	14.9	0.0	9.1	22.6

In-depth analysis of the above data showed that for students currently smoking tobacco the fact whether their partner smokes is most frequently of no significance (over 40% of smoking students expressed such an opinion) and – to a much lower degree – the situation was similar in the case of ex-smokers (respectively 15.6% of the group of ex-smokers).

**TABLE 8. Respondents' opinions on the significance of having a non-smoking partner versus the fact whether the respondents smoke tobacco.**

	I currently smoke tobacco %	I used to smoke %	I've never smoked actively but I often smoke passively %	I've never smoked actively and I rarely smoke passively %
Yes, it is very significant	34.4	50.0	51.9	66.3
Yes, it is significant, but to a limited extent	25.0	34.4	42.6	31.5
No, it is insignificant	40.6	15.6	5.6	2.2

The fact that their partner smokes is the most important for non-smoking students and those who are not exposed to passive smoking (over 66% of the group).

### The aspects of tobacco smoking by the partner – students' opinions

The authors made attempts to determine which aspect of tobacco smoking prevails in its evaluation made by the surveyed students. Therefore, it needs to be considered whether this fact is taken into consideration due to health-related factors (for the partner and the respondent) or aesthetic factors (the appearance and image of the body and close, intimate contacts) or cultural factors (courteousness, negative behaviour patterns, health culture). It should be emphasised that the considerable majority of the surveyed are women and most of the opinions belong to them.

**TABLE 9. The aspect of tobacco smoking by the partner versus the respondent's smoking.**

	I currently smoke tobacco %	I used to smoke %	I've never smoked actively but I often smoke passively %	I've never smoked actively and I rarely smoke passively %
Aesthetic	24.4	26.7	22.2	29.2
Cultural	4.9	6.7	6.9	7.5
Health-related	41.5	53.3	68.1	59.2
Other	4.9	0.0	0.0	1.7
Insignificant	24.4	13.3	2.8	2.5

In the group of the surveyed students, the health-related aspect of their partners' smoking was of the lowest significance for students who currently smoked. Slightly over 40% of the group expressed such an opinion. Despite the fact that this aspect prevailed in their opinions, this information is a cause for concern. This aspect was much more often emphasised by students who had never smoked but who were frequently exposed to passive smoking (more than 68% of the group) and non-smokers who were not passive smokers (over 59% of the group). It is also worth pointing out that the latter group of students most often regarded the aesthetic aspect as the one, which is of significance in intimate contacts. The opinions on the cultural aspect of smoking by the partner do not constitute differentiating factors in the surveyed group, but it is more important for students who have never smoked and rarely spend their time in rooms filled with smoke.

The detailed analysis of this element of the opinions has led to a conclusion that non-smoking persons who are passive smokers – students of obstetrics and psychology – are those for whom the health aspect of their partners' smoking is the most crucial (respectively 85% and 80% of the opinions of all the students in the group). Aesthetic aspects are the most significant for the currently smoking students of biology (45% of such opinions in the entire group). The cultural aspect is also most often mentioned by the students of biology – non-smokers who at the same time were passive smokers (14% of such opinions expressed

in this group of students). The partner's smoking is of no significance to a much higher percentage of obstetrics students who currently smoke tobacco (as many as 67% of the group expressed such an opinion).

**TABLE 11. The aspect of tobacco smoking by the partner versus the respondents' parents' smoking.**

	Aesthetic %	Cultural %	Health-related %	Other %	Insignificant %
Both parents smoke	42.6	2.1	72.3	2.1	14.9
One of the parents smokes/used to smoke	37.9	12.6	78.9	1.1	9.5
Neither of the parents smokes/used to smoke	26.2	9.2	80.0	3.1	7.7

It turned out that students whose both parents were non-smokers significantly more often pointed to the health-related aspect of their partners' smoking (80% of opinions expressed by this group of students). In turn, the aesthetic aspect was much more often emphasised by students whose parents were both smokers (42.6% of such opinions in this group of students). For those students, this fact was also most often of no significance (nearly 15% of such opinions). The cultural aspect was most frequently mentioned by students with one parent smoking tobacco (12.6% of such opinions in this group).

### Overview

In the available literature on the subject there are no studies directly relating to the obtained results. However, both studies raising the issue of young people's opinions on marriage and family and those presenting selected health behaviour of Polish students contain some aspects of measuring the influence of tobacco smoking on their adult life. The percentage of active smokers in the total number of the surveyed students was lower than in the survey by the Public Opinion Research Centre (CBOS) of 2010 in which the percentage of smoking women amounted to 21% and that of smoking

**TABLE 10. The aspect of tobacco smoking by the partner versus the type of university and the respondent's smoking.**

	I currently smoke tobacco				I used to smoke				I've never smoked actively but I often smoke passively				I've never smoked actively and I rarely smoke passively			
	UMCS Biology	UM Nursing	KUL Psychology	UM Obstetrics	UMCS Biology	UM Nursing	KUL Psychology	UM Obstetrics	UMCS Biology	UM Nursing	KUL Psychology	UM Obstetrics	UMCS Biology	UM Nursing	KUL Psychology	UM Obstetrics
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Aesthetic	45	38	13	0	0	33	25	18	27	32	13	8	29	33	24	34
Cultural	9	0	5	0	0	7	0	9	14	5	7	0	11	0	8	6
Health-related	27	50	50	33	67	56	25	55	55	64	80	85	55	67	63	56
Other	9	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	3	0
Insignificant	9	13	25	67	33	4	50	18	5	0	0	8	3	0	3	3



men 40% [5] (in the authors' own studies respectively 13% and 29%).

The incidence of smoking found in the surveyed group of students majoring in medicine corresponds to the results of the study carried out by Siemińska and co-authors (2006) focussing on 1<sup>st</sup> year students of two consecutive years of medical studies [6]. Particular attention should be paid to the finding that 79% of smoking students – future doctors – “do not regard smoking as a discomforting activity”. It seems that such an opinion is a reflection of the health culture of the students from Siemińska and co-authors' study. The research performed by the authors of this article also contains such a reflection in the opinion that smoking by life partners of respondents holds no significance to them, let alone the health-related connotations of this fact. The subsequent research by the same group indicated that an improved health awareness of the consequences of smoking developed during studies might be important in the context of quitting smoking [7]. Such a mechanism could also apply to the authors' own studies, in which it was found that nursing and obstetrics students smoked less often than their peers from KUL and UMCS, while the group of nursing students contained the largest number of ex-smokers. Nursing and obstetrics students participating in the authors' survey were less often tobacco smokers than students of emergency medical rescue and public health from the same university (Medical University of Lublin), whose attitudes to smoking were analysed by Kołłątaj and co-authors [8], and less often than students of Medical University of Łódź [9].

The study by Dutkiewicz and Jara conducted in the group of 144 female students of nursing demonstrated that “an ideal candidate for a husband” is, among other things, “addiction-free” [10]. The authors' own research indicates that in practice this criterion would be more often applied by students of medical majors than by non-medical ones. Partners of the former were more often non-smokers. The obtained results directly confirm the thesis that the choice of the life partner in combination with the assessment of his/her health behaviour (in this case tobacco smoking) may influence the “health-related quality” of the future relationship and the satisfaction of the partners. The research by Gulczyńska and Jankowiak on the sense of coherence among Polish students also confirms this thesis [11].

Z. Kawczyńska-Butrym was the originator of the research within the “Health Promoting University”, and was the first in Poland who in 1995, with her team, developed the assumptions for the programme based on surveys carried out with students of five Lublin universities. In the surveyed group, 23% were active smokers, while 29.9% of the group were men and 18.1% were women [12]. It is worth mentioning that in the authors' own research the estimates were 29.0% of active smokers in the group of men and 13.1% among women. Due to the time that has passed way, it is difficult to make detailed comparisons. For instance, it is impossible to compare the incidence of the students' passive smoking. It seems, however, that the results obtained in the author's study, being part of the pilot research, which served as the basis for a corresponding project, relate to one of the key theses of the Lublin project from 1995. The thesis claims that “a person's health depends primarily on the physical

and social environment in which he/she lives and the choices he/she makes...” [12].

## CONCLUSIONS

For most of the surveyed students it is important whether their partners smoke tobacco, but the health-related aspect of this behaviour is much more often mentioned by those students who themselves are non-smokers and whose parents do not smoke.

This observation allows us to formulate a thesis that the families of the surveyed students, due to particular health-related behaviour patterns, influence their opinions and choices associated with their and their partners' attitudes to tobacco smoking. This impact is so evident that – assuming another thesis – it somehow prevents some of students of medical studies from having more pro-health opinions and making healthy choices in spite of their health awareness, which for obvious reasons is greater than in the case of other students.

Unfortunately, the conducted research confirms that acceptance for the partner's smoking is greater in people who are themselves active smokers.

The period of university studies is when the choices made by young people – also regarding their future life partners – are so frequent and crucial that the university should influence those choices and guide students towards a pro-health direction. At the time of the research, most of the surveyed students were during the first years of their university education. The university's assistance in quitting smoking or at least limiting the number of cigarettes smoked for students throughout the period of studies could bring measurable health benefits for the students, their partners and their future family members.

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