

Smoking

According to the World Health Organization (2004), tobacco is the 2nd major cause of death in the world and is responsible for the death of 1 in 10 adults worldwide, or about 5 million deaths each year. Further, tobacco is the 4th most common risk factor for disease worldwide. The World Health Organization states that “in addition to the high public health costs of treating tobacco-caused diseases, tobacco kills people at the height of their productivity, depriving families of breadwinners and nations of a healthy workforce. Tobacco users are also less productive while they are alive due to increased sickness” (World Health Organization, 2004).

At one time, people were not aware of the hazards of smoking. But scientific research, public awareness campaigns, and cigarette warning labels have changed this misinformation. Nonetheless, many people—adults and youth alike—continue to smoke. The American Cancer Society (2006) estimates that there were 45 million adult smokers in 2005. They also estimate that 12% of middle-school-aged youth used some form of tobacco product in the same year.

Smoking tends to be more common for those with lower levels of educational attainment (American Cancer Society, 2006). It is believed that with more education people become more aware of the health consequences of tobacco use for themselves and others, and as a result, they smoke less. In addition, better educated people have a higher lifetime income stream to protect and so they may be more careful with important lifestyle choices like smoking.

The health consequences of smoking are many

- ▶ Cigarette smoking accounts for nearly 440,000 of the more than 2.4 million annual deaths in the United States (American Heart Association, 2007)
- ▶ Smoking, on average, reduces adult life expectancy by approximately 14 years (CDC, 2005a)
- ▶ Cigarette smokers have a higher risk of developing a variety of chronic disorders that compromise health. Studies show that cigarette smoking is a major cause of coronary heart disease, which leads to heart attack. Smoking also increases the risk of recurrent coronary heart disease after bypass surgery. Smoking increases blood pressure, decreases exercise tolerance and increases the tendency for blood to clot (AHA, 2007)
- ▶ The link between secondhand smoke and health status has also been established. Estimates suggest that as many as 40,000 people die from being exposed to other people’s smoke each year. About 35,000 of these nonsmokers die from coronary heart disease, including heart attack (AHA, 2007)

To Smoke or To Educate: What Are Our Priorities?

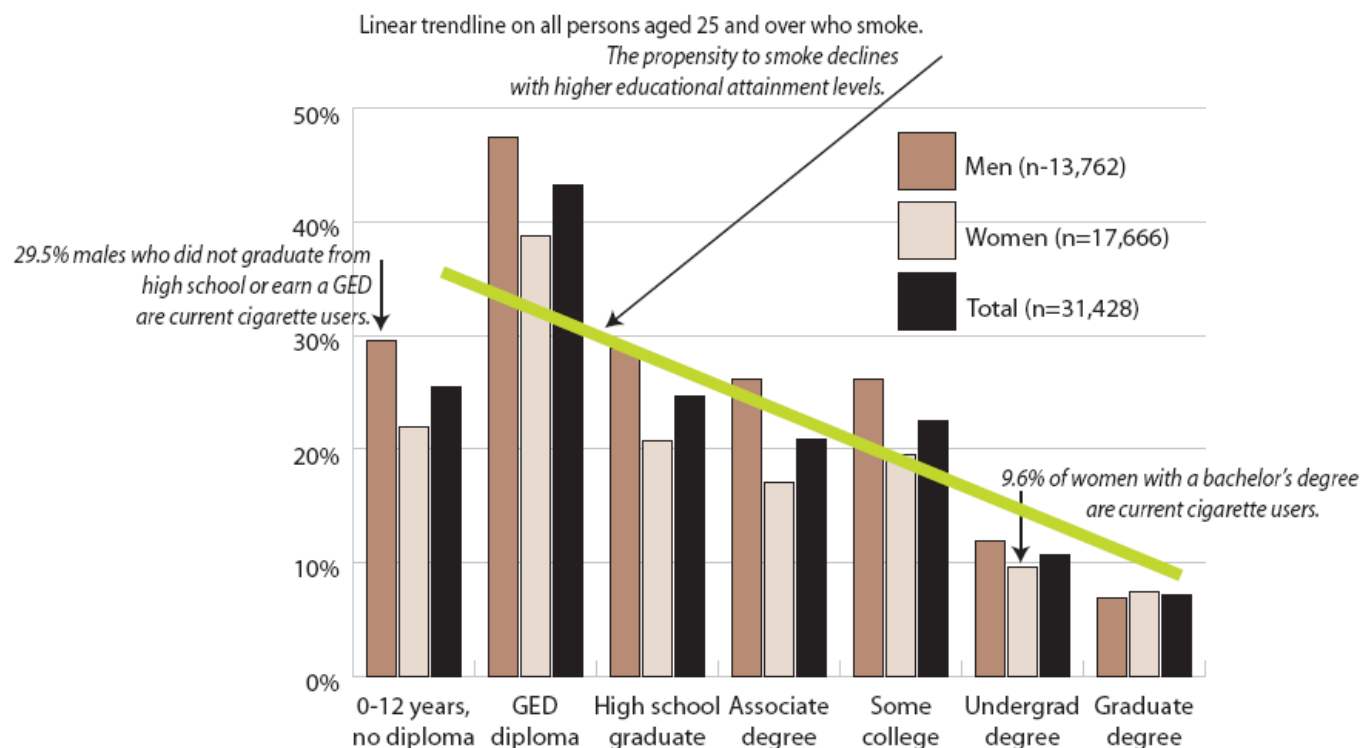
In 2003, cigarette companies spent \$15.2 billion, or more than \$41 million per day, on advertising and promotion.

To put this in perspective, spending in Tennessee on public education totaled \$6.9 billion in 2005/06 (State of Tennessee, 2007 & CDC, 2007a).

But the story does not end there. There are also substantial economic costs associated with smoking and tobacco use for the individual and society at large.

- ▶ Cigarette and tobacco use may divert household spending away from necessities. Total U.S. expenditures on tobacco were estimated to be \$88.8 billion in 2005, of which \$82 billion was spent on cigarettes (CDC, 2007a)
- ▶ Adverse health effects mean substantial forgone earnings for an individual and the family
- ▶ Individuals must pay more for insurance to provide health care to those with smoking-related health problems. Direct medical costs associated with smoking totaled \$75 billion between 1997 and 2001 (CDC, 2007a)
- ▶ Workers miss time from their job and may miss important on-the-job training opportunities that could otherwise enhance earnings
- ▶ The overall economy produces less output to the detriment of all. Estimates for average annual smoking-attributable productivity losses are approximately \$61.9 billion for men and \$30.5 billion for women (CDC, 2005b)

Percentage of persons who are current cigarette smokers by education level



Notes: From the National Health Interview Survey, US, 2005. See source for additional notes, exclusions, and confidence intervals.
Source: CDC, 2006.