

Beyond the Smoke: Where do They Smoke and Why?

Robert Angkang Shimray

Abstract

This study investigates the physical contexts and motivations underlying tobacco use among young individuals. Interviews and questionnaires were used to collect data from 416 male and female youths, providing key insights into the multifaceted dynamics of tobacco use. Thematic analysis revealed that smoking takes place in diverse settings such as friends' places, outdoor locations, schools, and homes, highlighting the nuanced interplay of individual, social, and environmental factors shaping these behaviors. Important themes emerged, including covert and overt smoking, parental restrictions, societal attitudes, and the anticipation of gaining the right to smoke with age. The findings emphasize the need for comprehensive strategies that take into account these varied contexts and motivations to effectively address tobacco use among adolescents.

Keywords: Tobacco, Smoking, Youth, Adolescent, Context, Parent, Secret

Introduction

Smoking has been a prevalent and enduring social phenomenon for centuries, transcending geographical, cultural, and temporal boundaries. Among adolescents, smoking behaviors are shaped by a complex web of social factors operating at multiple levels: micro (family and peer networks), meso (institutions like schools and workplaces), and macro (societal norms, policies, and media) (Poland et al. 2006). These layers collectively influence the acceptability and prevalence of smoking within specific environments. Understanding how adolescents navigate these contexts reveals how social relationships with parents, siblings, and friends, as well as access to tobacco, designated smoking spaces, and shared routines (e.g., who smokes together and how smoking is perceived), all contribute to smoking practices (Frohlich et al. 2002).

Smoking is not only a health behavior but also a social activity embedded in place, extending beyond the physical location of smoking to the meanings attached to those spaces. Homes, schools, street corners, hidden alleys, and even resettlement colonies are socially charged environments where smoking is negotiated and performed. These spaces reflect cultural norms, peer influences,

ROBERT A. SHIMRAY (Ph.D.), Department of Anthropology, North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong - 793022. Email: robert.angkang@gmail.com