

Smoking Behavior Among 84 315 Open-University Students in Thailand

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The aim of this study was to estimate the prevalence of smoking among students in an open university in Thailand and to describe smoking patterns in relation to the personal and social characteristics of the sample. A self-administered questionnaire survey was conducted in 2005 with 87 134 open-university students in Thailand; the respondents aged 15 to 60 years (N = 84 315) are the participants in this study. We found a substantial difference in smoking prevalence by sex, with a much higher proportion of smoking male (20.9%) than female (1.0%) students in all sociodemographic categories. Smoking decreased among men with a higher level of education or income; in contrast, among women, higher incomes were associated with more smoking. Most of the smokers started smoking in high school. The findings provide evidence that future policy making should aim to reduce smoking among the younger population in Thailand, and in particular, they point to the need to preserve low smoking rates among women.

Keywords: smoking; Thailand; trends; university students

Introduction

In Thailand, the proportion of smokers in the population has decreased in the past 3 decades from 54.7% in 1976 to 38.8% in 2006 in men and from 6.1% to 2.6% in women, although the intensity of smoking has increased in the same period. Thai smokers consumed an average of 87.6 packs of cigarettes each in 2005 compared with 71 packs per person per year in 2001-2002.^{1,2}

Tobacco ranked as the third highest health risk, after unsafe sex and alcohol, in Thailand, in 2004, and contributed to 5.8% (570 000 DALYs^{*}) of all DALYs lost.³ Smoking does not only pose health risks but also has direct and indirect economic impacts. Apart from income loss or increased expenses for treatment of smoking-related illnesses, the expense of

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*DALY = Disability adjusted life year. It is a time-based measure that combines years of life lost because of premature mortality and years of life lost because of time lived in states of less than full health.