Attitudes of Senegalese Schoolgoing Adolescents Towards Tobacco Smoking

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Results show that tobacco smoking is a widespread phenomenon among Senegalese adolescents for several important reasons: economic (the intensive advertisement campaigns in favor of tobacco smoking), cultural (the ambivalence of traditional attitudes of Western urbanization, and the attractiveness of the Western way of life), psychological (the traumas of modernism on a basically poor developing country). Despite this alarming picture, signs point to an effective preventive strategy aimed mainly at schoolgoing adolescents and based on joint legal, scientific, cultural, and even religious action.

INTRODUCTION

The damaging effect of smoking upon our health is now established beyond doubt. Several reports and research works provide ample evidence of this (e.g., World Health Organization, 1979; U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, 1976). Smoking is directly related to premature mortality; lung cancer; chronic bronchitis, emphysema, and asthma; heart and blood diseases; high blood pressure; mouth, pharynx, and larynx cancer; stomach ulcers; and stillborn babies. The absorption of

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nicotine entails psychic and physical dependence and causes a long chain of nervous and psychological disturbances.

The advertisement campaigns aimed at developing tobacco smoking in Senegal have been growing stronger and more intensive recently. Three obvious reasons explain this phenomenon. First, FAO figures show that Africa has the lowest mean consumption of tobacco in the world—0.30 kg/person/year versus 2.02 kg/person/year in industrialized countries. The African continent is therefore a huge potential market for the tobacco industries. The second reason is that European regulations against tobacco smoking have been increasingly severe to tobacco firms. Last but not least, the major tobacco firms and the Senegalese legislators seem to be engaged in a race against time. Its latest development is the law voted by the National Assembly at the end of October 1981 and applicable October 1982, which bans all forms of advertisement for smoking and tobacco smoking in certain public places.

_Le Soleil_, the government-funded national daily, finds it hard to choose between two courses: make a maximum profit out of tobacco consumption or take relentless action against it. The _Soleil_ issue of February 8, 1982 is a perfect illustration of this dilemma: Next to a detailed article entitled "The Tobacco War" appears a prominent advertisement for a well-known tobacco firm. Most of the efforts of the tobacco firms are aimed at the youth, a fragile and easy target, thereby scoring a twofold success: First, the companies address a highly impressionable age group; secondly, they ensure good yields for their investments over a long period—investing in the youth means investing in the future.

Advertisement campaigns for tobacco are particularly aggressive and well organized in Senegal. The main objective of cigarette advertising is to create an ideal: Smoking is a sign of manhood, since it attracts smart gold-covered women to the smoker by suggesting his strength and intelligence. Then smoking is a public exhibition of Western ease and wealth, with little or no connection to the genuine African values, in a world where "champagne" and "Rolls Royce" are the only worthy counterparts. Again smoking evokes an idyllic way of life, with plenty of spring, waterfalls, and open space. Finally, smoking means immediate privacy and harmonious integration within the group.

In view of the tremendous impact of smoking both on the Senegalese economy and population, it is essential to assess the vulnerability of schoolgoing adolescents to the temptations of nicotine. Adolescence being the time when life-long habits are being formed, it is self-evident that the analysis of the youth's behavior towards smoking is a prerequisite for any effective action against the scourge. Such is the aim of this study.