

Low Cigarette Prices Increase Likelihood that Youths Start Smoking

Key findings:



In 2016, youth (ages 13–15) smoking prevalence in Kosovo was around 9 percent (11.7 percent for boys and 5.6 percent for girls).



A 10-percent price increase would raise the average price of a 2.2-euro pack of cigarettes by 0.22 euros, which would reduce the hazard of youths starting to smoke by 14.3 percent.



Easy access to cigarette purchases increases the likelihood of youths starting to smoke.



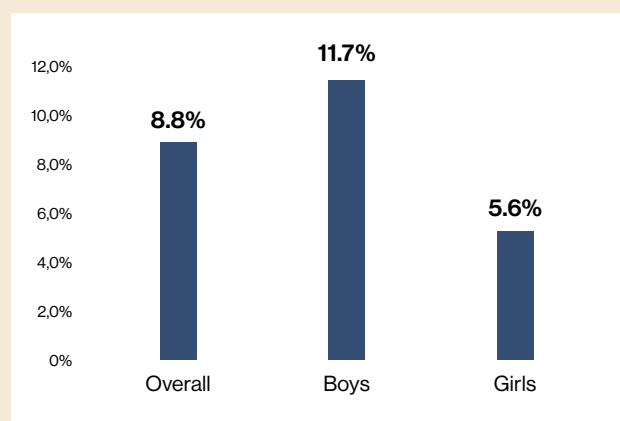
Smoking parents and peers have a significant impact on the onset of smoking among youth in Kosovo.

Background

Given that the initiation of tobacco use predominantly occurs during adolescence, for Kosovo—as the country with the youngest population in Europe—it is crucial to identify the driving factors behind the initiation of smoking.

Nearly 50 percent of Kosovo’s population is under the age of 25, and its youth—while considered one of the country’s greatest assets—could prove to be its Achilles’ heel if the youth are not healthy and productive due to tobacco consumption. In 2016, youth (ages 13–15) in Kosovo reported smoking prevalence of around 9 percent, at 11.7 percent for boys and 5.6 percent for girls (Figure 1).

Figure 1
Current tobacco users among youth ages 13–15

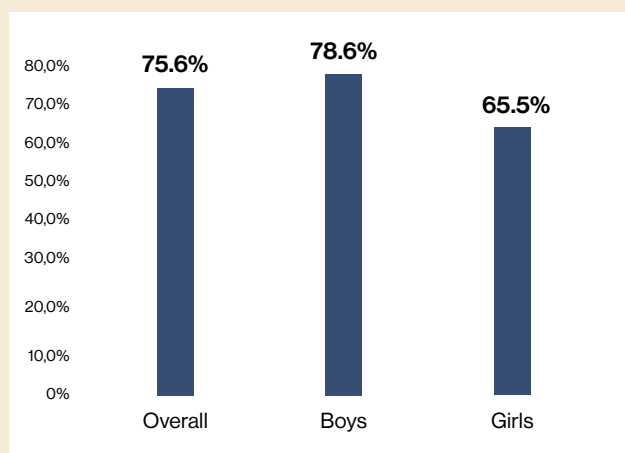


Source: GYTS, 2016

Figures 2 and 3 show the lack of law enforcement regarding the sale of cigarettes: more than 60 percent of youth were able to purchase cigarettes at legal points of sale, even though they were not of legal age to buy them.

Figure 2

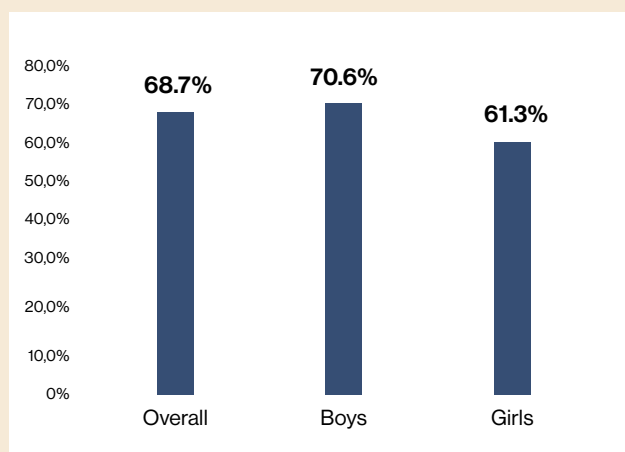
Youth smokers who bought cigarettes at the legal point of sale



Source: GYTS, 2016

Figure 3

Youth smokers allowed to buy cigarettes despite their age

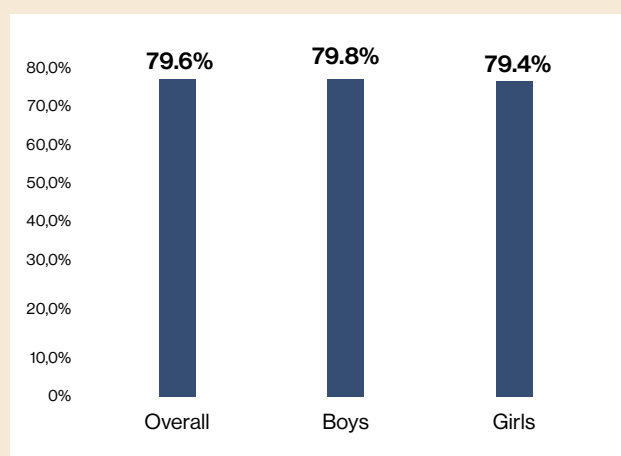


Source: GYTS, 2016

Smoking initiation among youth is a serious public health concern. Taking up smoking at a young age increases the likelihood that a person will continue to smoke into adulthood, often leading to long-term health problems. More than half of smokers will die prematurely from tobacco use. Thus, it is important for parents, educators, and policy makers to take steps to prevent youths from starting to smoke and help young people avoid the dangers of tobacco use.

Figure 4

Youth exposed to anyone using tobacco on TV, videos, or movies



Source: GYTS, 2016

There is a significant body of research on youth smoking initiation (the age at which individuals first start smoking cigarettes) and on factors identified as contributing to youth smoking initiation, such as peer influence, socioeconomic factors, family influence, and exposure to tobacco marketing.

Results

The results of the study indicate that the average age of smoking initiation among young individuals in Kosovo is 11 years old. Out of those who initiated smoking in the nationally representative survey sample, 61 percent are male and 38 percent are female. Notably, a small percentage (three percent) started smoking at the age of eight, while approximately 12 percent began at 15 years old.

The study suggests that prices play a key role in smoking initiation among Kosovo youth. A 10-percent price increase would increase the average price of a 2.2-euro pack of cigarettes by 0.22 euros, which would result in a reduction of the hazard of youth smoking initiation by 14.3 percent.

Price is a particularly strong determinant for young female smokers in Kosovo, who show an 85-percent

decrease in the expected hazard of smoking initiation for each one-percent increase in price. However, for young males, price does not demonstrate as significant results in determining smoking initiation.

Social environment also appears to be an important factor in the smoking behavior of young people in Kosovo. There is a 129-percent increase in the expected hazard if half of a youth's friends smoke, holding everything else constant.

Access to cigarettes is another significant determinant of smoking behavior among young Kosovars. Easy access appears to increase the hazard of smoking initiation. The results suggest that the expected hazard of smoking initiation is 286-percent higher for respondents for whom it is fairly easy to buy cigarettes, holding everything else constant.

Policy Recommendations

Increase the price of tobacco products through excise taxes. As this study shows, price increases can be an effective deterrent for youth: just a one-percent increase in price results in a 65-percent decrease in the expected hazard of smoking initiation.

Points of sale need to be more frequently inspected to enforce age verification measures at the point of sale and prevent youths from easy access to tobacco products.

Provide youth-focused education programs—comprehensive, evidence-based programs about the dangers of smoking—designed to deter youth from starting to smoke.

Implement mass media campaigns targeting parents to raise awareness about the detrimental effects of tobacco consumption on their children and the potential influence their behavior may have on their children's decisions to become smokers.

Acknowledgments:

Democracy Plus is funded by the University of Illinois Chicago's (UIC) Institute for Health Research and Policy to conduct economic research on tobacco taxation in Kosovo. UIC is a partner of the Bloomberg Philanthropies' Initiative to Reduce Tobacco Use. The views expressed in this document cannot be attributed to, nor can they be considered to represent, the views of UIC, the Institute for Health Research and Policy, or Bloomberg Philanthropies.