Tobacco Use Among Students Attending Historically Black Colleges and Universities: Prevalence, Patterns and Norms

Michelle Laws, M.A.
Doctoral Student
NCSU Department of Sociology and Anthropology
Starting with What We Know: National Research Findings

- Cigarette smoking rates declined between 1993 and 2000 among all U.S. adults except those aged 18 to 24 years. (Ott, Cashin, and Altekruse, 2005).

- Reports of college students’ tobacco use range from 27% to 34%. (American Legacy Foundation, 2003; Rigotti, Moran and Wechlser, 2005)
Starting with What We Know: National Research Findings

- 10% to 20% of college students initiate smoking or become regular smokers while they are in college. (Rigotti, Moran and Wechlser, 2005)
In 2004, African Americans made up 12% of college-student population (4-year institutions).

Among African American college students the rates of smoking and using other tobacco products are comparatively low (4% to 9%).
Setting the Research Agenda: Current Research Focus

- Preponderance of prior research was conducted in the predominately non-minority college settings with inferences drawn from general college population.

- Minimal evidence to support considerations of cultural and linguistic diversity and competency in prior research findings.
Setting the Research Agenda: Current Research Focus

- Very little is known about the prevalence, social norms and patterns of smoking among students attending Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).
- The current study investigates the prevalence, patterns and norms associated with tobacco use among college students attending HBCUs in North Carolina.
Methods

Random sample 2533 undergraduate college students attending nine HBCUs in North Carolina.

Cross sectional, self administered survey.

Questionnaire designed to mirror other widely used national survey instruments.

Field tested during the summer and fall of 2004 and implemented during the 2004-05 and 2005-06 academic years.
# Study Participants

**Waves 1 & 2**
- Bennett College for Women
- Elizabeth City State University
- Livingstone College
- North Carolina Central University
- Shaw University
- Winston Salem State University

**Wave 3**
- Fayetteville State University
- Johnson C Smith University
- St. Augustine’s College
**Demographics**
*(Waves 1 & 2, n=1741)*

**Race/Ethnicity**

- 84%
- 8%
- 8%

- White
- Black/African American
- Other
Demographics
(Waves 1 & 2, n=1741)

Gender

Male  Female
Demographics
(Waves 1 & 2, n=1741)

AGE

- 18-24: 88%
- 25-34: 8%
- +35: 4%
Demographics
(Waves 1 & 2, n=1741)
Demographics
(Waves 1 & 2, n=1741)

Academic Classification

- Freshman: 35%
- Sophomore: 30%
- Junior: 20%
- Senior: 14%
- Other: 1%
Findings

- 14.1% smokers compared to 85.9% non-smokers.
- Blacks are less likely to be current smokers than the “other” race group. (Beta -0.346, p = 0.05)
- Males were more likely than females to be current smokers. (Beta 0.688, p < 0.001)
History

• 58.4% of smokers reported that they were smokers when under the age of 18 compared to 25.1% of non smokers.

• 39.2% of the smokers reported that neither parents smoked while they were growing up compared to 53.6% of nonsmokers.
Social Norms

• The majority of the students (83.6%) responded that smoking was discouraged among their peers (86.2% of non-smokers compared to 67.4% of smokers).

• 8.9% of smokers reported that they prefer associating with peers who smoke compared to less than 1% (.8%) of non-smokers.

• 13.9% of current smokers compared to 43.8% of non smokers reported that none of their closest friends smoke.
Reasons for Smoking

Three leading reasons current smokers (n=276) identified for smoking:

• (1) “like the sensation I get” (22.5%)
• (2) “don’t know” (22.1%)
• (3) “other” (21.7%).
Reasons for Smoking, by Race/Ethnicity

African Americans
• “Like the sensation I get” (25.5%);
• “Don’t Know” (23.6%)
• “Other” (23.6%)

Whites and Other
• “Habit I can’t control” (40.5%)
• “Like the sensation I get” (20%)
• “Social tool” (16%).
Regression analysis shows that the major factors contributing to students’ decisions on smoking are:

- Gender
- Depression
- Peer Influences

- Overall, 18.5% of the variance of the dependent variable “Smoker” is explained by these three variables in the equation.
Leading reasons given by smokers for not being able to stop smoking:

- Strong cravings for a cigarette (44.2%)
- Feelings of irritability (29.3%).
- Peer influence (23.2%)
- Lack support (22.6%)
What are the ways students seek for quitting smoking?

In the past 12 months, the most common ways students sought help for quitting were:

- Sought information from the website or used web-based program (14.1%).
- Attended a smoking cessation or health education program at school (10.6%).
- Used medicine to help them stop (9.9%)
What are the ways students seek for quitting smoking?

- Used nicotine gum or nicotine patch (9.8%).
- Called a help line or quit line (8.6%).
- Attended a smoking cessation or health education program in community (6.1%).
What cessation programs are perceived as beneficial?

- “Self-help” (49.6%)
- Peer support (46.1%)
- School based programs (39.1%)
- Family support models (34.7%)
- Peer education models (26.7%).
# Implications

What intervention/prevention measures are being used for this population?

- School-based policies and environmental control strategies including:
  - Smoke-free areas on campus or smoke-free campus
  - Limited tobacco advertising on campus and/or in surrounding communities
  - Increased anti-smoking advertisement and public awareness campaigns
Much work remains to fill in gaps

- Further investigation into co-occurring symptoms, e.g. depression and high prevalence of tobacco use.
- Further investigation into the link between psychosocial needs and responses and smoking.
- Further investigation into use and prevalence of “other” substances, e.g. marijuana.
Much work remains to fill in gaps

- Evaluate current prevention and intervention programs to determine effectiveness.
- Conduct longitudinal studies on cigarette use (prevalence and rate), initiation, and reasons for use.
- Extend research beyond college campuses to communities.
Much work remains to fill in gaps

- More concerted efforts to promote culturally and linguistically relevant and informed research.
- Rigorous studies that are intended to explore link between cultural competence interventions and health and health care delivery outcomes.
Concluding Points - 1

Recommendations for conducting future research among this population:

- Avoid operating under the notion that “We find what we look for and we look for that which we know.”

- Set research agenda around the needs, interests and unique cultural characteristics and experiences of the population;
Concluding Points - 2

- Knowing and understanding the population is pivotal.
- Research should inform prevention and intervention program development.
- Findings from current research should encourage future research among this population across disciplines.
RESEARCHERS

Michelle Laws, MA, PhD Student, NCSU
Department of Sociology and Anthropology

Chien Ju Huang, PhD
North Carolina Central University

Rhonda Connerly, PhD
Morehouse School of Medicine

Al Richmond, MPH, North Carolina Institute for Minority Economic Development

Rod Brown, MA
North Carolina Central University

This study was funded through a grant from the American Legacy Foundation. For additional information contact Michelle Laws at malaws@ncsu.edu