

Girls and Tobacco*

Cigarette use is often initiated as a teen.

- ◆ Based on data from a 2003-2004 large national survey of students in grades 6-12, girls' initiation of smoking peaks during the teen years—16% of the middle school respondents and 17% of the high school respondents reported first smoking by age 12.¹⁰ (See also Figure 1.)

Many girls continue to establish tobacco habits despite the demonstrated health risks.

- ◆ Despite the risks associated with smoking, including respiratory problems, addiction to nicotine, coronary heart disease, and cancer,¹¹ national surveys report that significant proportions of young women continue to smoke. In 2005, 1 in 5 young women in 9th grade (21%) and 1 in 4 in 12th grade (26%) reported current tobacco use.⁵
- ◆ Current cigarette use was higher among White young women in grades 9-12 (27%) than among Latina (19%) and Black (12%) young women, as was smoking at least 20 of the last 30 days (12%, 2%, and 5%, respectively).⁵ (See also Figure 2.)
- ◆ In 2002, 13% of pregnant young women aged 15 -17 and 18% of pregnant young women aged 18-19 reported smoking during pregnancy,³ despite evidence that smoking during pregnancy increases the risks of fetal death, low birth weight, and sudden infant death syndrome.¹¹ (See also Figure 3.)

Figure 1: 12th grade girls' reported age of smoking initiation.¹⁰

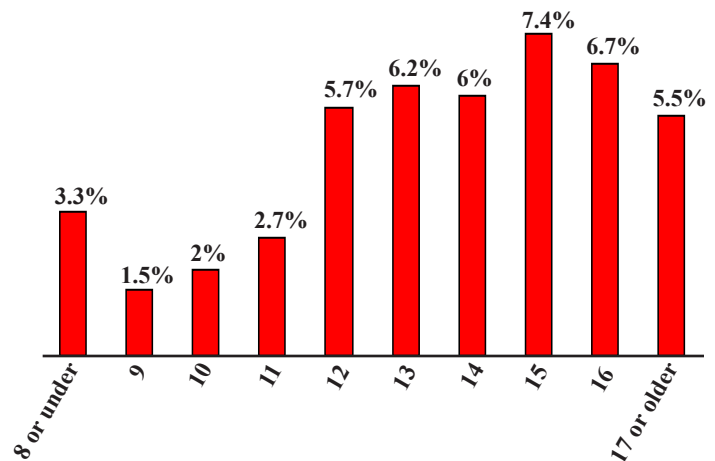


Figure 2: Percentage of current cigarette use among high school young women and young men, by grade.⁵

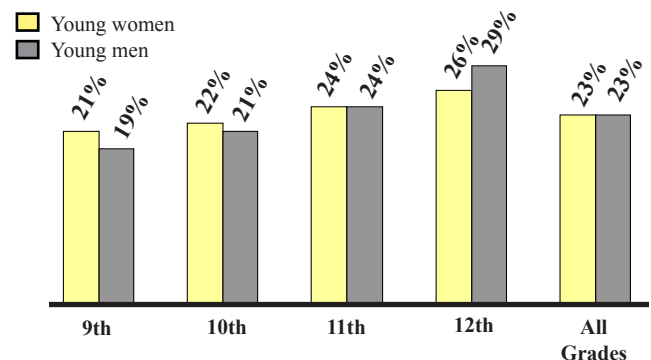
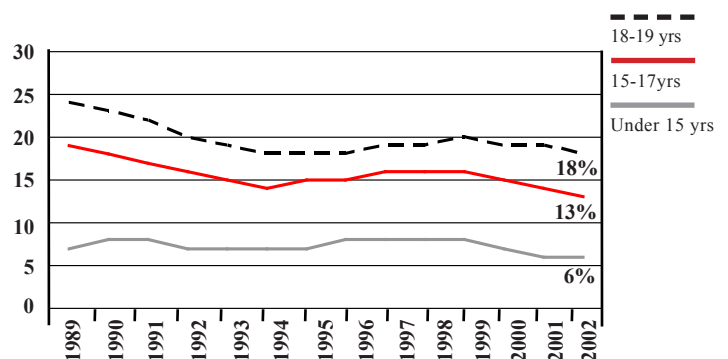


Figure 3: Percentage of current cigarette use among high school young women and young men, by grade.⁵



Girls and young women who smoke often are coping with numerous other risks to their health.

- ◆ In a large study in California, respondents who reported having been sexually abused before age 15 were nearly four times as likely as those who did not report sexual abuse to begin smoking by age 14.¹
- ◆ A large study of young people in two states found that girls who smoked in the 7th grade, even experimentally, were more likely to engage in risk behaviors by grade 12 than their peers who did not smoke at all. For example, smokers were nearly twice as likely as nonsmokers to report binge drinking.⁶ (See Figure 4.)
- ◆ Young women in grades 9-12 who were current smokers were twice as likely as young women who had never smoked to think that smokers have more friends. The difference was even more pronounced among girls in grades 6-8—girls who currently smoked were three times as likely as girls who had never smoked to think that smokers have more friends.² (See Figure 5.)

Tobacco use is not limited to conventional cigarettes.

- ◆ In 2004, girls and young women in grades 6-8 and 9-12 most commonly reported using tobacco in the form of cigarettes (9% and 22% respectively). Young women in grades 9-12 (8%) were more likely than girls in grades 6-8 (4%) to use cigars.⁴ (See Figure 6.)
- ◆ In a 2004 national survey, 20% of smokers ages 17-19 reported trying flavored cigarettes within the past 30 days.⁷
- ◆ Young women (2%) were less likely than young men (14%) to have used chewing tobacco, snuff, or dip on 1 or more of the 30 days preceding the study. Black young women (0.4%) were less likely than White (2.7%) and Latina (1.5%) young women to do so.⁵

Figure 4: Risk behaviors of young women in grade 12 by smoking behavior in grade 7.⁶

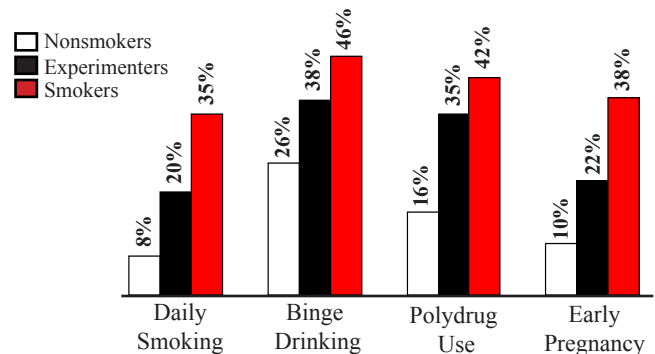


Figure 5: Percentage of girls who believe that smokers have more friends, 2000, by smoking status.²

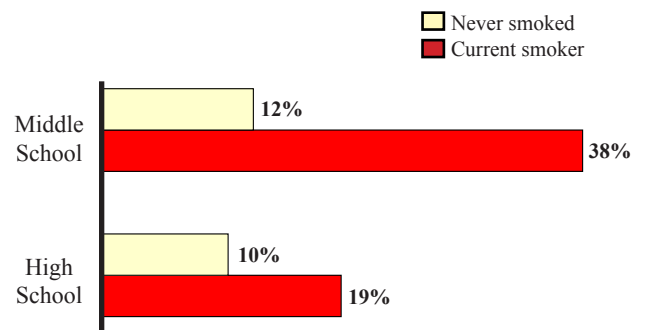
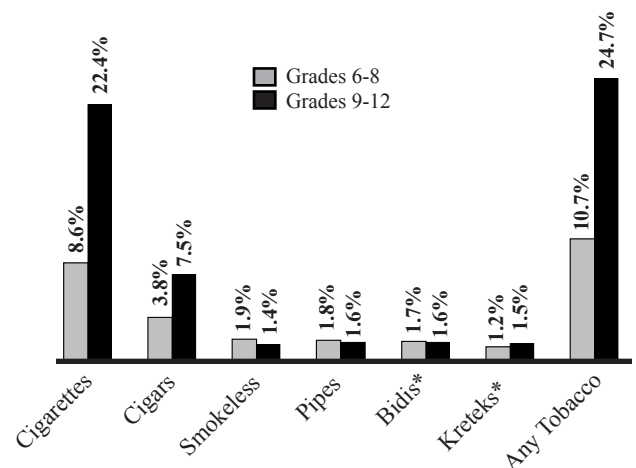


Figure 6: Percentage of middle and high school young women reporting current tobacco use in 2004, by type.⁴

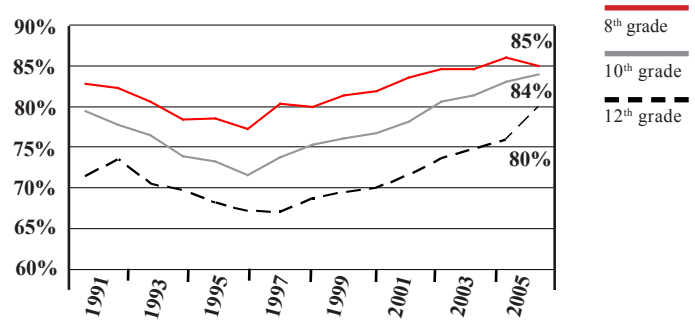


* Bidis are leaf-wrapped flavored cigarettes from India.⁴
Kreteks are clove cigarettes.⁴

Disapproval of smoking is increasing.

- ◆ In 1996, 77% of 8th graders, 72% of 10th graders, and 67% of 12 graders disapproved of smoking. Since then, the disapproval of smoking has steadily increased—85% of 8th graders, 84% of 10th graders, and 80% of 12 graders disapproved of smoking in 2005.⁸ (See Figure 7.)

Figure 7: Percentage of students reporting disapproval of smoking one or more packs of cigarettes a day, 1991-2005.⁸



References

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For more information on girls and health issues, see these Girls Incorporated® Fact Sheets:

- ◆ **Girls and Sexual Activity**
- ◆ **Girls and HIV, AIDS, and STDs**
- ◆ **Girls and Substance Use**
- ◆ **Girls and Their Bodies**

Girls Inc. Preventing Adolescent Pregnancy® bolsters girls' communication and skills as well as their motivation and resources for being in charge of their sexual health and avoiding teen pregnancy.

Girls Inc. Friendly PEERsuasion® builds girls' skills for resisting pressure to use harmful substances such as alcohol, tobacco, household chemicals, and other drugs.

Girls Inc. is a nonprofit organization in the United States and Canada that inspires all girls to be strong, smart, and boldSM. With local roots dating to 1864 and national status in the U.S. since 1945, Girls Inc. has responded to the changing needs of girls and their communities through research-based programs and advocacy that empower girls to reach their full potential and to understand, value, and assert their rights.

Girls Inc. programs focus on science, math, and technology, health and sexuality, economic and financial literacy, sports skills, leadership and advocacy, and media literacy for girls ages 6 to 18 throughout the United States and in Canada. While our goal is to reach all girls, we recognize that girls in at-risk communities have an even greater need for our programs. Of those we serve, 70% are girls of color and 66% come from families earning \$25,000 or less; 49% are from single-parent households, most of which are headed by women.

Girls Inc. in 2006 reached nearly 800,000 girls through Girls Inc. affiliates, our website, and educational products. Guided by our vision of empowered girls and an equitable society, Girls Inc. is committed to reaching millions more girls through its programs and public education efforts.

The National Resource Center (NRC) is the organization's research, program development, national services, and training site. Research and evaluation conducted by the NRC provide the foundation for Girls Inc. programs. The NRC also responds to requests for information on girls' issues and distributes Girls Inc. publications.

Girls Inc. informs policy makers about girls' needs locally and nationally. The organization educates the media about critical issues facing girls. In addition, the organization teaches girls how to advocate for themselves and their communities, using their voices to promote positive change.

Girls Inc. leadership focuses on developing innovative ways to leverage our most valuable asset – acknowledged expertise as the nation's premiere program provider and advocate for girls. Our leaders include Janice L. Warne, Chair of the National Board; Joyce M. Roché, President and CEO; and Donna Brace Ogilvie, Distinguished Chair.

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