

More smoke water pipes -- family habits significant

EurekaAlert

The number of people smoking water pipes is rising dramatically throughout the world. A large proportion of new users are young, and many believe contrary to facts that water pipe smoking is less dangerous than cigarettes. Research into why people start smoking water pipes is under way at Uppsala University.

Use of water pipes (also called "hookah" and "narghile") is on the rise, according to a number of studies conducted in Europe and North America. Anti-smoking campaigns typically focus on cigarettes and even, to some extent, snuff but rarely provide information about the negative effects associated with hookah use.

"Many adolescents and adults believe that hookah use is less dangerous than cigarette smoking," says Bengt Arnetz, Professor of Social Medicine at Uppsala University and Professor of Occupational and Environmental Medicine at the Wayne State University School of Medicine. "Some fail to understand that hookah use involves tobacco. In fact, smoking a hookah entails much greater exposure to carbon monoxide and other dangerous and carcinogenic substances in tobacco smoke than does smoking cigarettes."

Arnetz, in collaboration with various colleagues, has conducted a series of studies focusing on hookah smoking. One study, published in the journal *Nicotine & Tobacco Research*, involved investigating factors associated with increased likelihood of hookah use. Such studies have been conducted for many years in connection with cigarette smoking but are comparatively rare when it comes to hookah smoking.

One study conducted in Michigan determined that 26 per cent of the 800 participating subjects engaged in hookah use. Researchers found that the likelihood that a person engaged in hookah use was more than eight times higher if the father in the household smoked a hookah, seven times higher if the mother did so and 20 per cent higher if a sibling did so. More generally, men and young people constituted risk groups in connection with hookah use. The risk factors applied equally to people currently engaged in hookah use and those who had previously been so engaged but had stopped.

Arnetz and his colleagues are now planning comparative studies of hookah smoking in Sweden and the United States. They are also interested in investigating the spread of hookah use among adolescents and the effects of socio-economic and stress factors on smoking behaviour. The knowledge in question is important from the standpoint of designing future preventative strategies.

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