

WATERPIPE & CIGARETTE SMOKING IN SA

Waterpipe and cigarette smoking among university students in the Western Cape, South Africa

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South Africa has been successful in curbing tobacco use. Throughout the 1990s and the early 2000s, South Africa was often presented as an example of a middle-income country that, through tax increases and strong tobacco control legislation, was able to reverse the tobacco epidemic.

Because of these interventions the prevalence of cigarette smoking decreased from a peak of about 32% in the early 1990s to less than 20% in 2012. In contrast to the decrease in cigarette smoking, waterpipe smoking has become

increasingly popular in South Africa and in many other countries during the past 2 decades.

We estimated the prevalence of waterpipe and cigarette smoking and associated characteristics among university students in the Western Cape. An anonymous self-administered online questionnaire was sent to all registered students in 2013 at 4 public Western Cape universities. The 4578 valid responses were weighted to represent the Western Cape's university student population.

MAIN RESULTS

- 63% of Western Cape university students ever smoked waterpipe, 9.9% of students smoked waterpipe in the past 30 days and 17.7% of students smoked cigarettes in the past 30 days.
- Waterpipe smoking has a strong socialization aspect.
- Controlling for confounders, current waterpipe smoking is associated with alcohol consumption (positively), age (negatively), population group (mixed-race and Indian students smoke more), religion (Muslims smoke more), faculty (medical students smoke less), and spending money (positively).



Type of tobacco used at first encounter

	African (%)	Mixed (%)	Indian (%)	White (%)	Total (%)	P-value (H ₀ coefficients the same across race)
Have experimented with any type of tobacco	52.5	79.1	66.0	73.6	66.5	0.000
Of which:						
Manufactured Cigarettes	66.8	61.0	51.7	50.8	58.8	0.000
Roll-your-own cigarettes	6.9	1.6	0.9	3.3	3.8	0.000
Water-pipe	18.4	35.0	44.8	40.3	32.2	0.000
Cigars	5.5	2.4	2.1	5.1	4.3	0.000
Snuff	2.4	0.0	0.4	0.4	0.9	0.000
Total	100	100	100	100	100	

Source: WC Universities water-pipe usage survey

The table above indicates the type of tobacco used at students' first encounter. Not surprisingly, this is mostly manufactured cigarettes (58.8%), although 32.2% of students indicated that their first encounter was with waterpipe.

Is waterpipe smoking a "passing fad" among young people, and especially students, or is it the start of a different

strain of the tobacco epidemic? The literature is divided on this issue. Some researchers argue that it is too early to comment, whereas others argue that it is a global public health crisis.

The fact that about one-fourth of waterpipe users report negative health consequences attributable to waterpipe use indicates that it is not a harmless social activity.

POLICY LESSONS

- Since any form of tobacco use is addictive and detrimental to health, all forms of tobacco use should be actively discouraged by governments as outlined by the World Health Organization's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC).
- In SA, waterpipe smoking is currently unregulated, nor taxed.
- As part of the government's obligations under the FCTC, it should impose excise taxes and other regulatory measures to discourage use of smokeless tobacco.

Link to full research paper:

Kruger L, Van Walbeek, C and Vellios N. 2016. [Waterpipe and cigarette smoking among university students in the Western Cape, South Africa](#). American Journal of Health Behavior. doi: 10.5993/AJHB.40.4.3

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