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FACTORS AFFECTING TOBACCO CONSUMPTION IN ADOLESCENTS: THE IMPACT OF BODY IMAGE CONCERNS AND BODY WEIGHT STEREOTYPES

Abstract:

Tobacco consumption remains one of the key objectives of public health as the largest preventable risk factor for a wide range of severe health conditions. Although smoking initiation in adolescence may be experimental in character, it often progresses to regular smoking that can be highly stable over the life course. The present study seeks to explore adolescents' cigarette smoking patterns and address the impact of body image concerns and body weight stereotypes on the decision to smoke and the average daily cigarette consumption. The wide-held beliefs about the perceived weight-control benefits of smoking may have an impact on smoking initiation and the establishment of smoking habits. Furthermore, obesity stereotypes may provide the incentive for smoking endorsement. This study employed individual level data collected via a formal questionnaire from a random sample of Greek adolescents 12-19 years old (N=1254). Because of the limited nature of the dependent variable (zero cigarette consumption for non-smokers), a participation probability mechanism was introduced in the methodological framework since the decision to smoke and the actual level of cigarette consumption may constitute two separate stages of smoking behavior. The econometric analysis employed an ordered probit model with sample selection, and corrected for selectivity bias. Preliminary statistical analysis (Pearson chi-square tests) showed statistically significant differences in body image concerns and body weight stereotypes between adolescent smokers and their non-smoker counterparts. Further econometric analysis revealed that obesity stereotypes mainly influenced smoking participation and had a negligible impact on the level of cigarette consumption. Adolescents who were satisfied of their body weight were more likely to be moderate or heavy smokers, whereas willingness to engage in weight loss dieting was more intense in teenager smokers. Our findings further confirm the role of attitudes toward body image and body weight as a motivator for adolescent smoking behavior. Public health legislators should take into consideration adolescents' susceptibility and their special needs in order to design and implement effective tobacco control interventions.

Keywords:

adolescents, smoking behavior, body image concerns, body weight stereotypes, ordered probit model with sample selection

JEL Classification: D12, D18