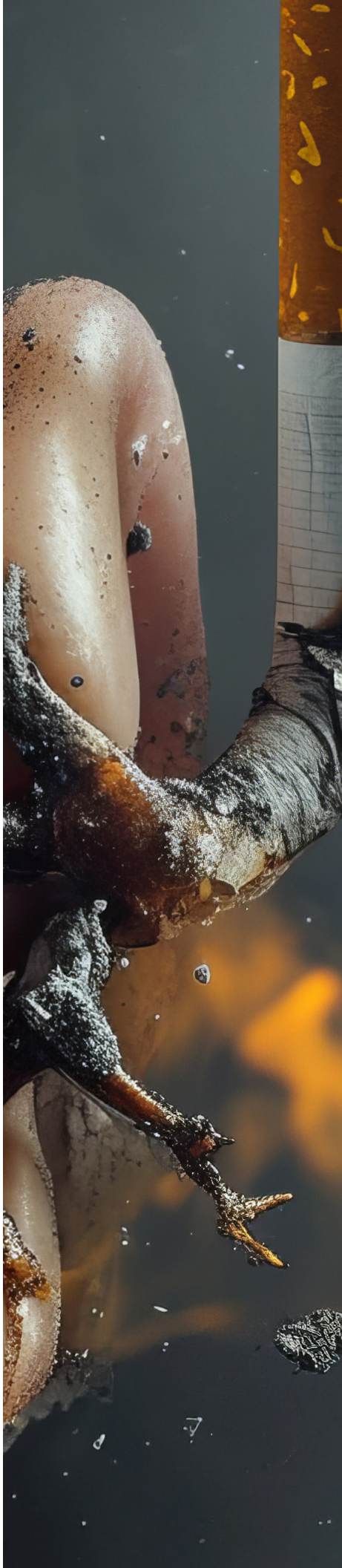
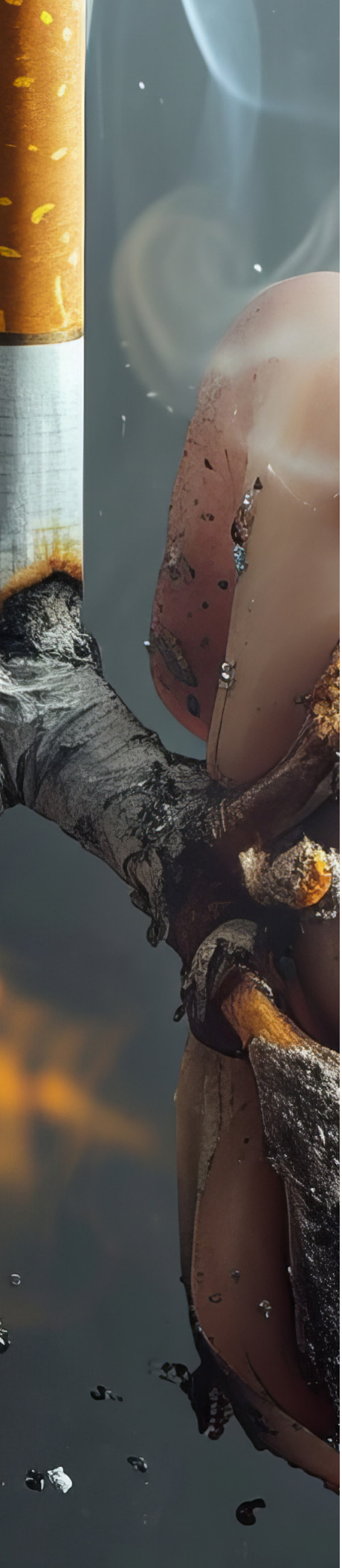
A REVIEW ON TOBACCO INDUSTRY AND YOUTH

Prepared By: ***Rabecca Kausa***

ABSTRACT

This desk research aims to explore the prevalence, causes and health effects of tobacco use among youths globally and locally and how the tobacco industry lures young people. A systematic analysis of empirical and review studies was conducted, relying on secondary data from peer-reviewed journals, WHO reports and public health literature. This review also identified key trends and interventions in tobacco use among youths.





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Introduction

The consumption of tobacco products among the youth continues to be a major global public health concern. Early initiation is strongly linked to long-term addiction, increased health risks and a higher likelihood of chronic diseases later in life. This desk review highlights key insights from current research on the drivers of youth tobacco use, with a particular focus on the tobacco industry's role in targeting young populations.

Historically, the tobacco industry has identified youth as a critical demographic necessary for maintaining its consumer base. Despite regulations intended to limit youth exposure to tobacco marketing, the industry has adapted its tactics to remain influential. These strategies often include flavored products, appealing packaging and marketing that por- trays tobacco use as socially acceptable, frequently under the act of promoting harm reduction or responsible use.

Digital platforms and social media have become key channels for indirect advertising, enabling the industry to bypass traditional restrictions and reach younger audiences more easily. The persistence of these strategies shows the importance of continuous public health advocacy, policy enforcement and youth education. By raising awareness of the industry's methods and strengthening protective measures, we can work towards reducing youth tobacco use and safeguarding future generations.

This study is intended to support stakeholders including educators, policymakers, health professionals and advocates in developing effective responses and knowledge-based interventions.

Objectives

- **To identify trends in tobacco use among youths.**
- **To analyze the driving factors influencing youth smoking.**
- **To review the interventions targeting youth tobacco use.**

Scope and Methodology

This research focuses on published studies and data related to tobacco use among youths using secondary data sources such as:

- **Peer-reviewed journals.**
- **Reports by World Health Organization (WHO).**
- **National health surveys and statistics.**

Key Insights From The Literature

Marketing and Promotion Strategies

Tobacco companies have historically targeted youth through strategic advertising campaigns and branding such as displaying of cigarettes near snacks, placement of cigarette advertisements near the eye-level of children, display of flavoured cigarettes and sale of single sticks of cigarettes [1]. Influencer marketing and Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube and Twitter have also become common tools for indirect youth engagement [2].

Targeting Youth through Product Design

There is an alarming increase in use of e-cigarettes among children and young people, with rates exceeding adult use in many countries. Even brief exposure to e-cigarette content on social media is associated with greater intention to use these products, as well as more positive attitudes toward e-cigarettes. Some of these products use cartoon characters and have sleek designs like toys and games, which appeal to the younger generation[9].

Tobacco Industry Lobbying and Regulation Evasion

The tobacco industry continues to lobby against strict youth protection laws. The indus- try not only strains the global economy, it also threatens public health and next generation addiction. In many countries, the industry seeks to sabotage health policies, affects the environment in negative ways and its dirty money buys influence, promotes misleading narratives, takes advantage of loopholes and pays for tactics to sabotage tobacco control [8].

Global Trends in Youth Tobacco Use

World Health Organization [4] highlighted that, in 2000, around one in six women (16.3%) aged 15 years and older were current users of some form of tobacco, which indicated three times less compared to the population of male users. By 2022 the rate for males was more than four times the rate for females. Based on existing data, a 30% reduction was already achieved among women in 2021. By 2025, the rate is projected to decline to 6.7% and further to 5.7% by 2030. The projected 2025 prevalence (6.7%) exceeds the 30% reduction target (7.8%) by an absolute 1.1%. The faster decline in prevalence among females is expected to increase further and reach just over five times by 2030 (see Fig. 1).

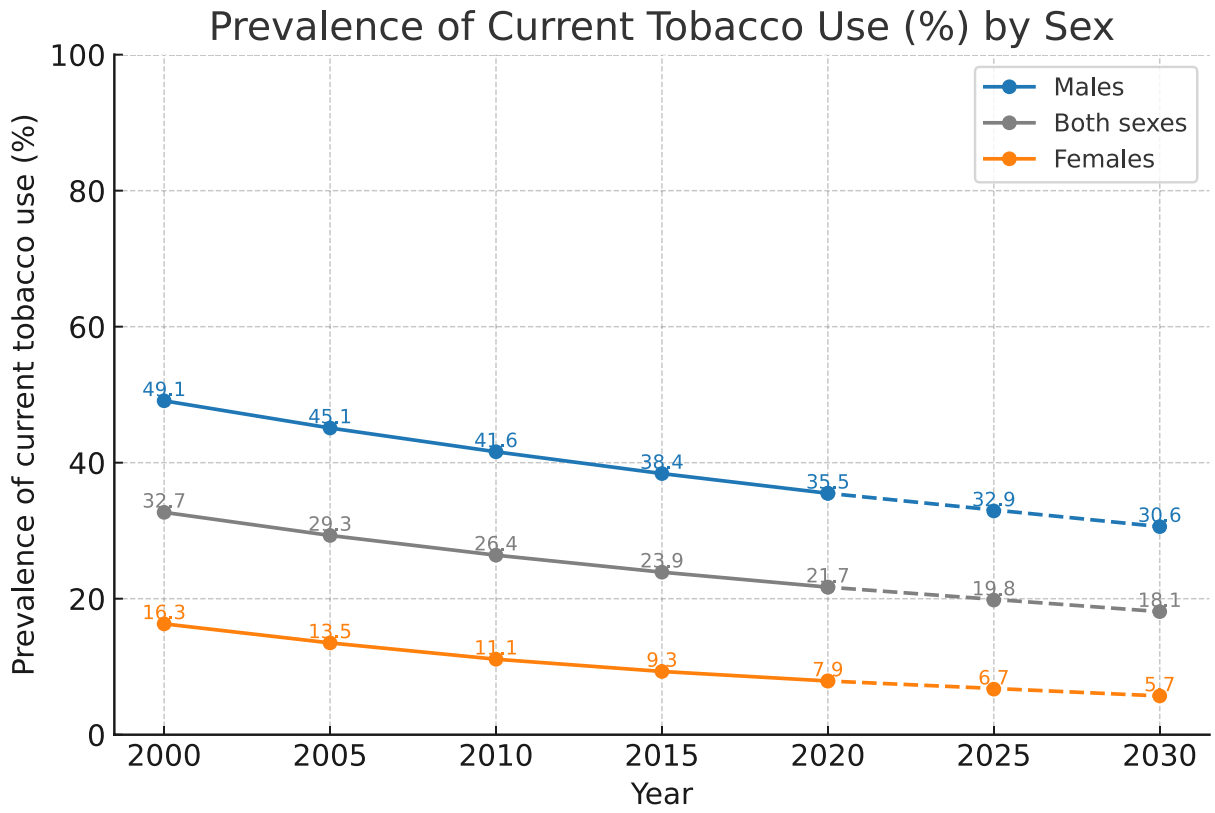

Figure 1: Global trends in prevalence of tobacco use among people aged 15 years and older, by sex, 2000–2030 (estimates to 2020, projections to 2030)

Recent literature highlights that while global progress has been made in introducing smoke-free laws, the pace and extent of implementation vary significantly across countries.

In 2007, only 10 countries had enacted comprehensive smoke-free legislation, cover- ing just 3% of the global population. By 2025, this number had risen to 79 countries, now protecting approximately 2.6 billion people under best-practice smoke-free laws.

How- ever, in low-income countries the situation remains critical, with over 40% yet to adopt comprehensive smoke-free measures [5].

Malaysia, Sierra Leone and Uzbekistan progressed from minimal smoke-free laws to full public smoking bans, while Indonesia and Slovenia expanded their coverage to include additional public spaces. The Cook Islands also advanced by extending their legislation to private indoor offices. Despite this momentum, further gains could be achieved if nine countries such as Armenia, Cyprus, Hungary, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Zambia, Senegal and Tonga banned smoking in just one more key public place [5].

Tobacco Products Used by Youth

Young people across the world are using a wide range of tobacco products, often in- fluenced by targeted marketing and product design aimed specifically at them. Most adult smokers begin as teenagers and over 90% of new users become addicted by age

25. Flavoured tobacco such as menthol, fruit and candy varieties has played a key role in making these products more appealing to youth by masking harsh tastes. Waterpipe (shisha) tobacco, often sweetened with fruit or mint flavors has also gained popularity among young users, particularly in social settings [7].

E-cigarettes and vapes have seen a rapid rise in use among adolescents, largely due to their flavours, sleek designs, and aggressive social media promotion. Across all product types, the tobacco industry continues to develop and promote nicotine products in ways that specifically attract younger demographics, raising serious public health concerns [7].

Findings and Analysis

Prevalence and Demographics

Tobacco use among adolescents in Africa remains a real concern. Recent findings show that around 14.3% of school-going youth aged 11 to 17 are using some type of tobacco product. Boys are using tobacco more than girls, with about 17.4% of boys and 10.6% of girls reporting use. When it comes to specific products, the numbers are fairly close, roughly 6 to 7 percent of adolescents reported using cigarettes, other forms of smoked tobacco, or smokeless tobacco. Shisha use also stands out, with about 5.2% of teens saying they've used it. A smaller group of young people reported using more than one product, with 3% using both smoked and smokeless tobacco and 1.5% using a combination of cigarettes and shisha [6].

Pokothoane et al. [6] also shed light on what drives tobacco use among adolescents. Being around people who smoke whether at home or school along with peer pressure and weak enforcement of age restrictions, were all linked to higher tobacco use. Country- level factors like regional location, religion and income level played a role, particularly when it came to cigarette and shisha use. These findings suggest that tackling youth tobacco use in Africa requires a broad approach one that addresses peer influence, school environments and home settings, while also pushing for stronger health warnings and stricter regulation on how tobacco products are marketed and sold.

Nicotine Addiction and Health Problems

Young people are especially at risk of becoming addicted to nicotine, which can have lasting effects on their health. Products like e-cigarettes and oral nicotine pouches have been linked to problems with breathing, heart health and oral hygiene. Although re- searchers are still working to fully understand the long-term impact of these products, what's already known shows they are not without harm [3].

Discussion

Even though there are global efforts to reduce tobacco use among young people, real challenges still exist especially when it comes to enforcing laws, educating youth and keeping up with newer products like vapes. In many places, cultural norms and economic struggles also play a big role in why tobacco use continues among adolescents.

Conclusion

Tobacco use among young people is shaped by a mix of social pressures, cultural influences and economic challenges. Tackling it effectively means bringing together different sectors through stronger policies, better education and active involvement from families and communities.

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