Tobacco, alcohol and cannabis use among high school students in Honiara, Solomon Islands

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Background: Substance use is associated with serious social, health, legal and academic problems. Prevalence rates of tobacco, alcohol and cannabis use in high schools are increasing in developing countries, but robust epidemiological data are scarce. This study aimed to estimate the lifetime prevalence of tobacco, alcohol and cannabis use among high school students in Honiara, the capital of the Solomon Islands (SI).

Method: This study utilised a random sampling, cross-sectional school-based survey of 1411 students in fifteen schools belonging to four school systems (National, Provincial and Community High Schools – Government and Mission), with an equal mix of males and females, age range 11 to 21 years, with a mean of 16.

Findings: Overall, lifetime prevalence for tobacco use was 33.1%, 38.4% for alcohol, and 20.6% for cannabis, with about 50% using in the past year. Prevalence rates for use of all substances were highest for students attending provincial high schools. Rates for cannabis use were higher than those from the WHO GSHS, but lower than a 2015 survey of youth in and out of school aged 15 to 24 in four provinces across SI (Quinn et al., 2017). Friends were the greatest predictor of substance use. Students who smoked cigarettes were significantly more likely to drink alcohol (4.4 relative risk), and smoke cannabis (relative risk 8.7).

Conclusions: The findings support the importance of developing evidence-informed prevention initiatives for pre-high school students that impact peer networks, undertaken in concert with supply reduction measures consistent with the local context.

Policy and Practice implications: Tobacco products are readily available and many beer outlets in Honiara have no restriction on the basis of age, and home brewing and illegal alcohol sales and cannabis easily accessible. There is a need for SI to develop policies and strategies to address substance use among secondary school students.

Themes: Adolescents and youth, Cross cultural and international

Conflict of interest: Nil